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**THE REDEMPTION OF RELIGION IN KARL BARTH'S *CHURCH DOGMATICS***

BY

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## **Declaration**

I, Bradley M. Penner, hereby certify that this thesis has been written by me; that it is the record of work carried out by me; and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

*To Marcia, Hanah, and Landen*

## Abstract

This thesis explores Karl Barth's (1886-1968) argument for "The True Religion" in his *Church Dogmatics* I/2, §17.3, particularly the four "aspects" (i.e., creation, election, justification, and sanctification). Because this thesis focuses on Barth's theology of the true religion and its four "aspects," it contributes to a knowledge of his theology of religion in general and the Christian religion in particular by offering a more holistic interpretation of his theology of religion as both wholly negative and wholly positive in contrast to the vast majority of scholarship which interprets Barth's theology as only against religion. By using the re-translation of §17 wherein the infamous German word *Aufhebung* is rendered more correctly as "sublimation" (rather than the original "abolition") this thesis argues that Barth's theology of religion is not wholly negative; rather, that of all religions God solely sublimates the Christian religion. This thesis focuses exclusively on Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and in chapter one it provides a thorough exegesis of §17 to show how the four "aspects" in his theology of the true religion are the culmination of his argument that the Christian religion is the true religion. This is accomplished by emphasizing Barth's use of the *simul iustus et peccator*, which is the analogous paradigm to understand the Christian religion as the true religion, because even though the Christian religion is wholly sinful it is also wholly just as evidenced in God's sublimation of it. In chapters two through five each "aspect" is respectively explicated first and then proceeds to the corresponding sections in the later volumes of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* that display the strongest theological continuity with each "aspect" in order to demonstrate how they complement, correct, and complete his theology of the true religion. The first "aspect" on creation sees Barth stress the anhypostasis of the humanity of Jesus Christ, which has continuity with his theology of the affirmation of creation in III/1, §42, especially creation as justification. In the second "aspect" on election Barth employs the covenant between Old Testament Israel and the Christian religion, which he also utilizes in II/2, §34, particularly in the twofold judgment and mercy of God. In the third "aspect" on justification Barth emphasizes the theme of the forgiveness of sins, which corresponds to IV/1, §61, specifically the pardon of the sinner. The fourth "aspect" on sanctification, particularly the motif of proclamation, aligns with his theology of sanctification in IV/2, §66, particularly the praise of the Christian's works. This thesis concludes by offering an ethical postscript, which derives from and builds upon its discussion and enlargement of the four "aspects" and prescribes a posture of humility in which the Christian religion must relate towards other religions because it is also still a religion. This ethic also includes a purified pride in which the Christian religion boldly proclaims to all other religions that God sublimates it alone into the true religion in the hope that the adherents of other religions will eventually join the Christian religion.

## Lay Summary

This thesis explores the 20<sup>th</sup> century Swiss theologian Karl Barth's (1886-1968) argument for why the Christian religion is the true religion as found in his most important work *Church Dogmatics*. This thesis argues that because the majority of scholars have misinterpreted Barth's theology of religion in general as completely negative, consequently his theology of the true religion has been grossly neglected. This thesis corrects this problem and makes a contribution to scholarship on Barth's theology by arguing that his theology of the true religion is the pinnacle of his theology of religion, especially in the concluding four "aspects" of creation, election, justification, and sanctification. These "aspects" are the four acts of God wherein he reveals that the Christian religion is the true religion; and yet because of Barth's curt discussion of these "aspects" this thesis must proceed to the later volumes in his *Church Dogmatics* and draw upon the corresponding doctrines, which aid in understanding better and appreciating more his unique and original argument for why the Christian religion is the true religion. Chapter one shows how Barth believes the Christian religion is simultaneously abolished and purified (i.e., sublimated) in the event of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, which is testified to in the four "aspects." Chapters two through five take each of the four "aspects" in turn and show that when one draws upon these later corresponding doctrines they are able to better understand Barth's prior argument for the Christian religion as the true religion. The concluding ethical postscript contends that the moral posture the Christian religion must take toward other religions is humility, which also includes a purified pride to proclaim boldly that it alone is the true religion, which gives hope to the adherents of all other religions that they too can become members of the true religion.

## Acknowledgements

I begin by thanking God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – for choosing, creating, calling, and commissioning me to complete this doctoral thesis at New College School of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh.

To my wife Marcia and our two children, Hanah and Landen, I am grateful for their agreeing to and accompanying me to Edinburgh where we had many smiles and the occasional tears over our four years of learning how to be Scottish/British. It is to them that I dedicate this thesis. To my parents, Dean and Ursula, and father- and mother-in-law, David and Gail, I am thankful for their love and support over the years of patiently watching and waiting for me to finish my formal education.

The completion of this thesis is the culmination of many years of theological study beginning in 2002 where I first learned the craft of theology from two faculty members who still shape my theology in profound ways. To Drs. Jan van Vliet and Myron B. Penner I am immensely grateful and indebted for not only teaching me what to but also how to think theologically, even if their respective ways could not have been more diametrically opposite. In my graduate studies Prof. David Guretzki continually exposed me to the theology of Karl Barth in a very empathetic and emphatic way and it was his encouragement that prompted me to consider enrolling in doctoral studies sooner rather than later. In me David instilled a critical love of and appreciation for Barth's theology that has continued into this thesis and hopefully for many years to come. My time as a doctoral student has not been without its zeniths and nadirs, particularly regarding the unforeseen exchanging of my primary supervisors. I am very thankful for the two years of official tutelage I received under Prof. Paul T. Nimmo, not only for imparting to me much theological wisdom when I audited his courses on Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* but also for his ever-gracious and incisively constructive criticisms of my thesis in its embryonic and infancy stages. I am also thankful for Paul opening his house to me and his other doctoral students for the annual home seminar of which I will always have fond memories. Paul will always be my *Urdoktorvater* even though I moved to Prof. David A. Fergusson's supervision after Paul's departure. To David I owe a debt of gratitude for taking over supervision of my thesis at its halfway point and guiding me to its completion.

Throughout my time as a doctoral student I crossed paths with many other students, particularly in the Semples Close postgraduate study room and over lunch in the Rainey Hall. I am thankful for the camaraderie and cheeky banter that I shared with Kurtis Peters, Kengo Akiyama, Will Kelly, Andrew Kelley, Adam Shreve, Andrew Kaiser, Brent Brodie, Andrew Kloes, J.T. Turner, Josh Coutts, Tom Breimaier, Denni Saragih, and Samuel Hildebrandt. Another community that played an important role for my family and me is Charlotte Chapel. We are thankful for the warmth and acceptance that these brothers and sisters in Christ showed to us during our time in Edinburgh.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Is the Christian religion the true religion?

In the light of the empirically verifiable fact that there are many religions in the world today, not to mention throughout human history, coupled with their respective and often contradictory truth claims, the question over the possibility of discerning which religion is the true one is seemingly hopeless or at a minimum undesirable. Moreover, for any adherents of a religion to claim that theirs, and theirs alone, is the true religion smacks of bigotry and chauvinism. Nowadays it is more acceptable simply to agree to disagree while engaging in benign dialogue, which is usually nothing more or less than sharing respective confessional facts, rather than to proclaim that, of all the religions in the world and throughout human history, there is only one that is true rendering all the others false. In the view of this insurmountable hurdle or futile cul-de-sac, to invoke of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) seems at best humorous or at worst contradictory due to the fact his theology is apparently a poor and counter-intuitive solution to this problem. However, Barth not only theologizes about religion in general, he also makes the claim that, relative to all the religions of the world past, present, and future, the Christian religion is the true religion. This thesis will contend that Karl Barth's argument for the Christian religion as the true religion is a unique and original contribution in the history of Christian theology. This will be accomplished by showing how he develops his theology of the Christian religion as the true religion in the light of his theology of divine revelation, which is the *Aufhebung* (sublimation) of the Christian religion as *Unglaube* (faithlessness), and culminates in the four "aspects" of the Christian religion as the true religion: creation, election, justification, and sanctification.

Specifically, this thesis will critically evaluate and elucidate these four “aspects” by drawing upon these doctrines in the later volumes of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*.

## **RATIONALE AND CONTEXT**

This thesis may be a surprise to those familiar with the study of Barth’s theology of religion<sup>1</sup> as copious monographs and articles have and still wrestle with his theology of religion from his *Römerbrief* era (1918-1922) through to and including his (supposed) theology of religions in *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, §69.2.<sup>2</sup> Inasmuch as

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief, Erste Fassung: 1919* (Zürich: TVZ, 1985), 247-294; *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 229-270; *Der Römerbrief, Zweite Fassung: 1922* (Zürich: TVZ, 2010), 212-253; *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 181-191; *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, Teil I: Prolegomena 1924* (Zürich: TVZ, 1985), 223-235; *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf, I. Band: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes, Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* (Zürich: TVZ, 1982), 397-417; *Church Dogmatics I/2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 280-361; *Kirchliche Dogmatik I/2* (Zürich: EVZ, 1938), 304-397; Garrett Green’s re-translation of §17 – *On Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion* Translated by Garrett Green (London: T&T Clark, 2006); See also: *Unveröffentlichte Texte zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik* (Zürich: TVZ, 2014), 9-113. This is an omitted subsection (the original §42.1) from the final draft of Barth’s *Kirchliche Dogmatik III/1* (Zürich: EVZ, 1945) and is titled “Gott und die Götter.”

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Veitch, “Revelation and religion in the theology of Karl Barth,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24/1 (1971): 1-22; Osgood Darby Cannon, “The Concept of Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1975); Carl Starkloff, “Karl Barth on Religion: A Study for Christians in Mission,” *Missiology* 6/4 (1978): 441-461; Wolf Krötke, *Der Mensch und die Religion nach Karl Barth* Theologischen Studien 125 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1981); Peter Harrison, “Karl Barth and the Non-Christian Religions,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23/2 (1986): 207-224; Charles Waldrop, “Karl Barth and Pure Land Buddhism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24/4 (1987): 574-597; Garrett Green, “Changing the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth’s Theory of Religion,” *Journal of Religion* 75/4 (1995): 473-486; J.A. Di Noia, “Religion and Religions,” in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 243-257; Martin Hailer, “Gott und die Götter: Zum nachgelassenen §42,” *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 19/1 (2003): 60-79; Christian Link, “Der Religionsbegriff Karl Barths: Einleitung in KD I/2, §17,” *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 19/1 (2003): 8-24; Michael Weinrich, “Von der Humanität der Religion: Karl Barths Religionsverständnis und der interreligiöse Dialog,” *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 19/1 (2003): 25-44; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Karl Barth and the Theology of Religions,” in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 236-257; Wolf Krötke, “Impulse für eine Theologie der Religionen im Denken Karl Barths,” in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 104 (2007): 320-335 [ET: “A New Impetus to the Theology of Religions From Karl Barth’s Thought,” in *Cultural Encounters* 7/2 (2011): 29-42]; Tom Greggs, “Bringing Barth’s Critique of Religion to the Inter-faith Table,” *The Journal of Religion* 88/1 (2008): 75-94; Matthew Myer Boulton, *God Against Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Glenn Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype: The Theology of Karl Barth as a Resource for Inter-religious encounter in a European Context* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010); Tom Greggs, *Theology Against Religion* (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Garrett Green, “Religion” in *The Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth*, ed. Richard Burnett (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 180-181; Sven Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology as a Resource for a Christian Theology of Religions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

these works shed much light on and offer pointed critiques of Barth's ever-developing theology of religion(s) they also either completely neglect or merely acknowledge his argument for why the Christian religion is the true religion, especially the four "aspects" at the end of his treatment on "The True Religion" in *Church Dogmatics* I/2, §17.3. This thesis fills a void in the knowledge and understanding of Barth's unique argument for the Christian religion as the true religion as seen in his construction of the four "aspects" in §17.3 particularly how they are complemented, corrected, and completed by sections of his later doctrines of creation (§42), election (§34), justification (§61), and sanctification (§66). Moreover, one can only speculate stemming from the curtness of the four "aspects" why other scholars may view this as a quasi-appendix or, in a supreme twist of irony, there is not enough written by Barth to warrant a thoroughgoing exploration into and evaluation of it. Whatever the reason(s) behind this neglect this thesis will demonstrate in the succeeding chapters, why these four "aspects" are the zenith of Barth's theology of the Christian religion as the true religion and are to be understood and developed as such, particularly in relation to their corresponding later doctrinal treatments. Thus, this thesis is a critical, constructive, and corrective work in which the later doctrinal formulations in Barth's *Church Dogmatics* are brought to bear upon their earlier corresponding "aspects" as seen in his theology of "The True Religion." Only then can the reader most fully appreciate Barth's original and unique argument for why he believes the Christian religion is the true religion. The remainder of the introduction will discuss the scope and sequence of the sources to be used, an explanation of the translation issues involved will be provided, and it will conclude by presenting the outline along which the overall argument will follow.

## **SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY**

The primary source of this thesis is Barth's magnum opus *Church Dogmatics* (1932-1967). This stems from the desire to understand his theology of the Christian religion as the true religion as drawn from his most mature theology rather than offering a broad, historical-genetic account of how his theology of religion in general, and theology of the Christian religion in particular, developed from his earlier exegetical works to his jettisoned attempts at dogmatics and ending with his (supposed) theology of religions in *Church Dogmatics* §69.2. Regarding methodology, an expositional and evaluative approach will be employed, which will expound what Barth's argument is in the specific sections that are under discussion regarding religion in general and the true religion in particular; moreover, Barth's arguments for the true religion will be expounded in order to evaluate them in the light of the later sections and the exposition of them. This exposition will take a dialectical approach as seen in exegeting each "aspect" first and then moving forward to the corresponding later doctrine in order to show how the latter relates (both in similarity and dissimilarity) to the former "aspect." This is because, as Mark Lindsay argues,

one of the most common mistakes made by Barth scholars is to short-circuit their reading of his theology; to assume, in other words, that what he posits in one section is not in fact balanced (or even overturned) by what he says elsewhere. *Latet periculum in generabilius*—danger lurks in generalities—was one of Barth's favourite sayings, and yet it is too often the case that Barth's interpreters have generalized one set of one-sided statements without seeing whether and where Barth poses the corrective. It is important that we do not fall into that trap here.<sup>3</sup>

A further reason why the later doctrines which correspond to the earlier "aspects" are drawn upon is because Barth rarely discusses a doctrine in a hermetically sealed

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 95.

sphere that does not also relate later on to other doctrines; rather, he re-employs prior doctrines both explicitly and implicitly relative to other later doctrines in his *Church Dogmatics*. T.F. Torrance contends that,

at every step forward in his *Church Dogmatics* Barth probes ruthlessly into the subject from different angles, going round and round the same point at different levels with different series of questions until he can see and understand the truth in its own reality and wholeness, and then he sets himself to find a way of expressing it in ways that are adequate and appropriate and faithful to the whole truth in its objectivity, in its manifoldness and in its native force.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, a synchronic approach will be employed regarding Barth's theology of religion and the true religion as it is presented in §17 and then a diachronic approach to demonstrate how §17 relates to later sections in his *Church Dogmatics*. This move is made because even though, according to Tom Greggs, "Barth did not engage *directly* with the topic of religion after §17"<sup>5</sup> this thesis contends that he did so indirectly and thus justifies the evaluation of how his later doctrinal formulations complement, correct, and complete the four "aspects" in §17.3.

### **STRUCTURE AND TERMINOLOGY**

A comment about structure is now in order as this thesis discusses Barth's doctrine of creation before his doctrine of election, which is in contrast to the structure of his *Church Dogmatics*. The first reason is structural, formal, and respectful as it stems from that fact that in §17.3, where Barth formulates his four "aspects," he discusses creation before election. Hence, creation is discussed before election as well and partly out of respectful deference to Barth's original structure. This, however, does not necessitate a slavish following of the material of Barth's doctrine of the

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<sup>4</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 20-21. Krötke also remarks that, "it is simply characteristic of Barth's way of working, continually to take things up again that have already been addressed; the [*Church Dogmatics*] honestly do not balk at anticipations and repetitions." "A New Impetus," 34.

<sup>5</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 75. Author's emphasis.

sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation in §17.3 as it is accepted that Barth's mature doctrine of creation is re-orientated, because it is determined by, his mature doctrine of election. Even though Barth's doctrine of election could have been discussed before his doctrine of creation, it is contended that as long as one is always cognizant of the fact that Barth's mature doctrine of creation is determined by his mature doctrine of election and the respective formulations thereof, then the structure is of secondary importance for their understanding of and argument for Barth's doctrine of the Christian religion as the true religion.<sup>6</sup>

A very important aspect of our thesis must now be discussed and made clear – terminology. Barth published *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2 in 1938 and it was translated into English in 1956. In the original German Barth employs the term *Aufhebung* in §17 in a highly technical sense, which includes a double entendre of “abolish” and “purify” but was mistranslated originally into English simply as “abolition.” In 2006 Garrett Green re-translated §17 opting for the English “sublimation” in an attempt to encapsulate the dual meaning expressed by *Aufhebung*. In an earlier article, which was the catalyst for Green's re-translation of §17, he states he is

convinced that the mistranslation of the crucial term *Aufhebung* as “Abolition” has played a major role in encouraging the caricatures of Barth's theology that have for so long distorted its reception in the Anglo-Saxon world. Barth has borrowed a favorite term of Hegel's and put it to his own use. He shares with Hegel the conviction that the truth can only be told by saying no and yes; and he finds in the unique ambiguity of the verb *aufheben* a way of articulating their dialectical interrelationship.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a more thorough discussion on the current debates over Barth's mature doctrine of election and its relation to other doctrines (especially the Trinity) see: Michael T. Dempsey, ed. *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 477.

However, not all scholars agree with Green's re-translation, preferring to retain "abolition." Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen initially warns that, "Having acknowledged this ambiguity of the term [*Aufhebung*], however, one has to keep in mind the fact that words change meaning over the course of time. Etymology, while an interesting and often exciting exercise into the mysteries of word meanings, can also be used to explain away the force of the current meaning."<sup>8</sup> He then argues that, "While it is impossible for us to see into the mind of Barth when penning these famous lines of paragraph 17, everything about the immediate context seems to favor the contemporary face-value meaning of the term, namely, 'abolition.'"<sup>9</sup> Even though Kärkkäinen provides a good and necessary warning not to overstretch the semantic elasticity of words beyond their intended, original meaning as well as pointing out that the meaning of words contain the possibility of changing over time, this thesis is not concerned with the contemporary German usage of *Aufhebung* but how Barth used the term in his time and context as a Christian theologian. Moreover, to project one's contemporary understanding of *Aufhebung*/sublimation back into Barth's use of the term is an egregious anachronistic error, which arrogantly assumes that they (especially in the English-speaking world) understand *Aufhebung* better than Barth did in his particular context and why he used it the way he did. Therefore, this thesis sides with Green's re-translation of *Aufhebung* as "sublimation" and will use this word throughout this thesis unless otherwise stated. Furthermore, this thesis is not concerned with Barth's employment of *Aufhebung* in other sections of his *Church Dogmatics* as it has a special function in §17, even though it will point out other German words/verbs that have a parallel or overlapping theological relation to

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<sup>8</sup> Kärkkäinen, "Karl Barth and the Theology of Religions," 247.

<sup>9</sup> Kärkkäinen, "Karl Barth and the Theology of Religions," 247.

*Aufhebung* (e.g., *Aufnehmen*, *Aufleben*, *Erheben*). Because of the simultaneously dialectical movement of *Aufhebung* as “abolition” and “purification” it will be demonstrated in chapters two through five how that same movement is indirectly evident in these other German words/verbs and thereby strengthen Barth’s argument for Christian religion as the true religion. Joseph Mangina correctly states that,

*Aufhebung* – a complex term borrowed from Hegel, [suggests] not just dissolution or suspension but elevation, reconstitution at a higher level. Viewed simply as a human activity religion is a dubious enterprise, a sign of human unbelief. This includes Christianity. Indeed, in a very real sense Christianity is the most culpable instance of religion, since it seeks to turn revelation itself into a human possession. Barth is not saying Christianity is ‘better’ than other religions; rather, he is making a sever judgment about the phenomenon of religion as a whole. But just as the individual sinner may be justified by faith, so the Spirit may sanctify even fallen religiosity. When Barth concludes that Christianity is, for all its flaws, the ‘true religion’, he makes it very clear that this is not by any inherent virtue it may possess, but solely by God’s grace. Christianity – or more concretely the church – is uniquely true among the religions because of the witness it bears; it alone directs people to the triune God.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, it is critical to be mindful throughout this thesis that this understanding of *Aufhebung* as the simultaneously dialectical event of “abolition” and “purification” governs Barth’s theology of the Christian religion as the true religion.

A second term that must be discussed is *Unglaube*. Although not as difficult to translate as *Aufhebung*, it is a crucial term in Barth’s theology of religion in §17. The original English translation renders *Unglaube* as “unbelief” but this thesis sides with Green’s choice of “faithlessness,” since “unbelief” does not fully capture the seriousness of *Unglaube* as an intentional and purposive act by humans to justify themselves before whatever deity they construct. As will be shown in the exegesis of §17.2 religion is, for Barth, not humanity’s passive acceptance of the God who reveals himself to it; rather, it is humanity’s active work of forming and forging its

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 44-45.



own deity before whom they try to vindicate their respective religious lifestyles.

Glenn Chestnutt argues well that, for Barth, “The fallenness of human religion is unbelief, consisting not primarily in a simple ignorance of God’s revelation, but in an active rejection of it through the proud attempt to make oneself the subject in the divine-human relationship in place of God.”<sup>11</sup> The intended and critical irony of Barth’s use of *Unglaube*, as brought out in the English word “faithlessness,” is evident in the fact that humans, as religious, are those who believe that by being religious they are faithful to their deity of choice; however, for Barth, they are actually faithless as the acting subjects who attempt to know on their own terms and control by their own means the deity they worship. Gregg states that, for Barth,

The Christian religion is one form of the subject “religion” of which there are other forms. Christianity, also, therefore, stands under the critique of religion as *Unglaube* (faithlessness). What is more, the Christian religion stands under this judgment above all religions. Far from revelation raising the status of the Christian religion above all other religions to a position of superiority, it reveals to the Christian her religion as unbelief.<sup>12</sup>

The final term to be defined is “religion,” and this thesis concurs with Wolf Krötke that, for Barth,

“religion” refers to the *human capacity* to be receptive to God or to the divine, and to give shape to the relationship with God in religious behavior. The influence exerted by this human capacity upon the Christian faith and church was the problem that moved Barth theologically throughout his life. All his judgments about religion were formed in the course of examining the phenomenon of religion *within the Christian church*.<sup>13</sup>

This means Barth desires to provide an exclusively *theological* account of religion, and even though he interprets religion as faithlessness and the Christian religion as

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<sup>11</sup> Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype*, 25. Even though Chestnutt does not use “faithlessness” his definition corresponds to the activism of religious faithlessness as defined by Barth in §17.2.

<sup>12</sup> Gregg, “Bringing Barth’s Critique of Religion to the Inter-faith Table,” 83.

<sup>13</sup> Krötke, “A New Impetus,” 29. Author’s emphases.

exclusively sublimated from its faithlessness he also has great respect for the role and reality of all religions in human history. However, just because Barth affirms the capacity of the human for religion does not mean he upholds any “point of contact” between God and the human in their capacity for religion; rather, the human’s capacity for religion only affords her the possibility of faithlessness.

### **OUTLINE**

In chapter one it will be argued that Barth’s theology of religion, as set forth in §17 of *Church Dogmatics* I/2, has been too long misunderstood due to the fact that many scholars have primarily interpreted Barth as solely negative towards religion, thereby supposedly seeing no current and/or final redemption for religion in general and/or any religion in particular. The chief reason for this is because scholars have been wrongly influenced by the mistranslation of *Aufhebung* as “abolition” rather than the more accurate term “sublimation” in §17. It is, therefore, necessary to understand and appreciate Barth’s unique theology of religion as not only a devastating critique of religion (primarily the Christian religion) as a general human activity but also a witness to Jesus Christ as the one who judges and condemns all religions and yet redeems one of them in his gracious self-revelation. Before all this, however, Barth’s theology of religion is situated within the context of his theology of revelation, particularly how it relates to and is determined by the “pneumatic” reality and possibility of the self-revelation of God. The chapter concludes by arguing that in order to appreciate fully the importance of Barth’s theology of religion, especially the Christian religion as the true religion, one must understand how it relates to his later doctrines of creation, election, justification, and sanctification.

Chapter two discusses the first “aspect” by which God, in the name of Jesus Christ, sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion by focusing on how Barth’s explication of the divine creation of the Christian religion in §17.3 relates to his treatment of God’s affirmation of creation in *Church Dogmatics* III/1, §42 (“The Yes of God the Creator”). It will be argued that the chief correlative doctrine between the two sections is the anhypostasis of the human nature of Jesus Christ. In §17.3 Barth employs the anhypostasis when he argues that just as Jesus of Nazareth has no independent existence apart from union with the eternal Son of God so too the Christian religion cannot be the true religion in independence from Jesus Christ who is its creator. By way of continuity in §42.3 (“Creation as Justification”), Barth implicitly utilizes this same doctrine to argue that creation cannot be God’s good creation unless it is created in and for Jesus Christ as the one who vanquishes “the Nothingness” and justifies creation as good. Therefore, it will be contended that a doctrinal continuity exists between the divine creation of the Christian religion in particular and creation in general because the Christian religion is a created microcosm that testifies to the macrocosm of creation as justified by God.

Chapter three expounds the second “aspect” by which God, in the name of Jesus Christ, sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion as seen is the church’s divine election with Israel in the one covenant of God made in Jesus Christ. Barth more fully discusses this covenantal relationship between Israel and the church in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, §34 (“The Election of the Community”), and it will be argued how Barth understands the Christian religion as the true religion, particularly its divine election in §17.3, in the light of his later discussion of the covenantal relationship of Israel and the church in §34.2 (“The Judgment and the Mercy of

God”). It is there that Barth argues how God elects Israel to be judged (as seen in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ) and elects the church to be shown mercy (as seen in the resurrection of Jesus Christ). As the one elect community of God, Barth believes no one can understand Israel in abstraction from the church and *vice versa* for they are bound together in the eternal covenant of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Christian religion is the true religion but only as understood in its covenantal relationship to Israel. Hence, the Christian religion is the true religion but did not become so in abstraction from Israel; rather, it emerged out of Israel by virtue of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who is the *telos* of Israel. For Barth, the church existed in embryonic form within Old Testament Israel and, thus, still needs contemporary Israel as a constant reminder of how God condemned faithless religion in the crucifixion and re-created the true religion in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The fourth chapter explains the third “aspect” by which God, in the name of Jesus Christ, sublimates the Christian religion as divine justification. Drawing from and building upon his previous discussions on the divine creation and election of the Christian religion, Barth continues in §17.3 by arguing how the Christian religion becomes the true religion only as God justifies it in his forgiveness of its sin of faithlessness. For Barth, it is only as God judges all human religion (and especially the Christian religion), and thereby justifies himself first, that he then justifies the Christian religion and forgives it its sin. The corresponding later section to this “aspect” of §17.3 is *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, §61 (“The Justification of Man”) wherein the two motifs that have the strongest continuity between the two sections are §61.2 (“The Judgment of God”) and §61.3 (“The Pardon of Man”). It will be argued that the judgment of God in the justification of the Christian reiterates and

extends Barth's argument in §17.3 in which the judgment of God is against and upon all human religion(s) thereby justifying himself as true and rendering every human a liar as evidenced in their faithlessness. This judgment, however, is not an end in-and-of-itself; rather its goal is to destroy the old religious human and replace her with a new religious human. In the light of the "judgment of God" as the justification of God against and yet ultimately for the human, Barth argues how God's judgment includes his pardon of the human. It is in the "pardon of man" where Barth discusses the forgiveness of sins, which is a key event in the act of sublimation in which God justifies the Christian religion into the true religion in §17.3. The pardon of the sinful human by God reveals, however, that she is still fully sinful and fully justified, which has strong continuity with Barth's understanding of the Christian religion as a "justified sinner." The Christian religion is fully sinful because it is a religion in solidarity with all other religions in faithlessness and yet it is also fully justified (i.e., pardoned) making it the true religion. Therefore, the Christian religion, as the true religion, is known only in the dialectical analogy of a "justified sinner" in §17.3, and thus more clearly understood and appreciated when seen in the light of Barth's mature doctrine of justification.

The fifth and final chapter will expound the fourth and final "aspect" by which God, in the name of Jesus Christ, sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion as divine sanctification. In §17.3 sanctification is the positive and active "aspect" of the Christian religion as the true religion, especially its act of proclamation. The goal of the creation, election, and justification of the Christian religion is its sanctification, which is to declare the name of Jesus Christ in whose name alone the Christian religion is sanctified. Barth also argues how the

sanctification of the Christian religion is a once-for-all and, therefore, a continual event in its historical existence. Because God continually speaks his Word, the Christian religion must continually hear, obey, and proclaim his Word; moreover, just as the Christian religion is comprised of justified sinners, so too are they sanctified sinners who must continually acknowledge that they are the true religion only in the name of Jesus Christ. The theme that has the strongest continuity between §17.3 and *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, §66 (“The Sanctification of Man”) is proclamation, which is seen most clearly in §66.5 (“The Praise of Works”). For Barth, only as the Christian religion proclaims Jesus Christ does it participate in him and is sanctified; consequently, the sanctity of the Christian religion is always promised to but never possessed by it, meaning its sanctification must be daily received and actualized or else the Christian religion risks forfeiting the basis of and purpose for being the true religion.

The conclusion proposes an “ethics of exclusivity” for the Christian religion as the true religion in its relation to all other religions. This ethic demands from the Christian religion, first and foremost, a posture of humility because of its mutual solidarity with all other religions in faithlessness, and yet also requires the Christian religion to witness to Jesus Christ with a “purified pride.” The implication of the Christian religion’s witness to all other religions and even itself is that since God sublimates its adherents in spite of their faithlessness there is, then, hope for all other adherents of all other religions that God can also sublimates them (but not their religions) from their faithlessness to be participants in the true religion – Christianity.

## **CHAPTER 1: THE REVELATION OF THE REDEMPTION OF RELIGION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will provide an exegesis of *Church Dogmatics* I/2, §17 in which Barth formulates his mature understanding of religion in general and the true (i.e., Christian) religion in particular. After providing a short discussion on Barth's situating of his doctrine of religion within his doctrine of revelation it proceeds to comment on each of the three subsections in §17. Beginning with the problem of religion in theology, it will show how Barth's theology of religion in his *Church Dogmatics* betrays him as a modern theologian who draws upon, but does not capitulate to, the intellectual resources of modernity. Also, it will show how Barth traces back the theological declension of the church's understanding of religion to two theologians and how their unfortunate innovations led to the reversal and corruption of the relationship between revelation and religion. In the exposition of the second subsection it will be demonstrated how Barth understands all religions as a concretion of human faithlessness (*Unglaube*) to God precisely in their respective religiosities, and then mysticism and atheism will be discussed, which Barth believes exemplifies the faithlessness of religion. In the final subsection Barth's theology of the true religion will be shown as highly innovative but also sorely neglected, especially the four "aspects" by which God sublimates the Christian religion. By employing the doctrine of the *simul iustus et peccator* Barth recasts the argument for the Christian religion as the true religion in order to show its solidarity in faithlessness with all other religions and yet is simultaneously the true religion because it is sublimated by God in the fourfold divine act of creation, election, justification, and sanctification. The chapter concludes by refuting two common

misperceptions of Barth's theology of religion: sublimation as renovation/perfection and his (supposed) bigotry and chauvinism for Christianity as the true religion.

### **THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMATIC OF RELIGION**

Barth's theology of religion is situated within his theology of revelation. Placed broadly within his "Doctrine of the Word of God" in *Church Dogmatics I/2* (specifically in the cluster of sections in "Part III – The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit"), §17 is preceded by a discussion on the subjective reality and possibility of the revelation of God in the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (§16). It is followed by a discussion on those whom God encounters in his self-revelation and, consequently, must continually seek after and testify concerning him (§18). Greggs states that, "Barth's discussion of religion here falls within the section where he treats the way in which revelation reaches humanity—the subjective appropriation of revelation through the third mode of God's triune being. Barth's concern here is the *reception* of revelation, and it is under that topic that he feels it necessary to discuss within this theme the concept of religion."<sup>14</sup>

Before Barth commences his theological treatment of religion, however, he recapitulates *in nuce* his prior argument for the subjective reality and possibility of the self-revelation of God which is found in God alone. Referring to §16 Barth remarks that, "when we asked how God does and can come to man in His revelation, we were compelled to give the clear answer that both the reality and the possibility of this event are the being and action only of God, especially of God the Holy Spirit. Both the reality and the possibility!"<sup>15</sup> After arguing for the subjective reality and

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<sup>14</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 24. Author's emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> *CD I/2*, 280. The original English translation of §17 will be used unless otherwise indicated.



possibility of the self-revelation of God which is found in God alone, Barth once more takes the opportunity to distance his theology from those who might see an ontological point of contact between God and humanity for the subjective reality and possibility of divine revelation (e.g., Emil Brunner; Erich Przywara). Though not explicitly mentioned, it is believed Barth is wary of any *analogia entis* influencing his doctrines of revelation and religion, hence his obstinacy that the subjective reality and the possibility of revelation is found in God alone. Barth declares that,

We could not fix the reality of revelation in God, and yet find in man a possibility for it. We could not ascribe the event to God, and yet attribute to man the instrument and point of contact [*Anknüpfungspunkt*] for it. We could not regard divine grace as the particular feature and man's suitability and capacity as the universal. We could not interpret God as the substance and man as the form. We could not, therefore, regard the event of revelation as an interplay between God and man, between grace and nature.<sup>16</sup>

For Barth this divine delimitation is necessary because not only do humans not possess the innate capacity to procure the subjective possibility of knowing God in his self-revelation but also, and most importantly, because their unwillingness as participants in sinful Adamic history ultimately renders them undesirous of any such knowledge of and relation to God. Therefore, for Barth, the reality and possibility of God's self-revelation is "an event which encounters man, [and] this event represents a self-enclosed circle."<sup>17</sup> This "self-enclosed circle" must not be confused with a vicious circle in which the human purportedly has a religious encounter with God but tragically/conveniently remains ignorant of God. Rather, according to Greggs, the event of the self-revelation of God is a virtuous circle in which, through the

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<sup>16</sup> CD I/2, 280; KD I/2, 305. Regarding Barth's initial and (in)famous response to Brunner see: *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002). For an excellent recent treatment on Barth, Przywara, and the *analogia entis* see: Keith Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> CD I/2, 280.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit, “God opens humans up to the possibility of revelation, determining that the revelation of God comes not only from above but also terminates within the human.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, in the event of his self-revelation, God continually encloses himself with the human, which means, according to George Hunsinger, the human’s relationship with God “is not possessed once and for all, but is continually established anew by the ongoing activity of grace [... which] draws us beyond ourselves into a relationship of communion, of love and freedom, with God.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, it is imperative for Barth that the event of the self-revelation of God not be understood as a completed datum but as a dandum, i.e., a continuing reality and possibility in which God does not cease to be the living God and the human is not eclipsed behind and/or abolished in the event of revelation. Gregg concludes that it is “the Spirit of God who frees humans to be children of God and it is by the Spirit that sinful humans become capable of receiving the divine speaking. Humans remain human in this relation and God remains God.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, even though Barth has been labeled a “Christocentric theologian,” one must be mindful, at least in his theology of religion, “to pay due attention to the work of the Spirit in revelation.”<sup>21</sup>

In §17.1 (“The Problem of Religion in Theology”) Barth begins his theology of religion by problematizing it. More than simply pedagogical, Barth is concerned to situate his theology of religion within his theology of revelation in order not to abstract his theology of religion from the self-revealing God. Barth contends how the event of divine revelation “is in fact an event which encounters man. It is an

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<sup>18</sup> Gregg, *Theology Against Religion*, 33.

<sup>19</sup> George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Gregg, *Theology Against Religion*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Gregg, *Theology Against Religion*, 32.

event that has at least the form of human competence, experience and activity. And it is at this point that we come up against the problem of man's religion."<sup>22</sup> This statement clearly reveals why Barth must be considered a modern theologian for, as Green states, "Nothing so marks the *Church Dogmatics* as a work of *modern* theology as its explicit attention to religion."<sup>23</sup> This further explains why Barth discusses human religion in the light of divine revelation, as it prevents him from capitulating to the *Zeitgeist/Weltanschauung* of modernity all the while utilizing modern concepts in the construction of his theology of religion. Trevor Hart opines that "Barth's own determined retrieval and rehabilitation of the concept of revelation was certainly not an attempt to ignore or skirt around the consequences and insights of this prolonged struggle to come to terms with the distinctive spirit of modernity, but was born out of its very midst."<sup>24</sup> Thus, one must neither hastily condemn nor slavishly condone Barth as a modern theologian but be critically understanding of his context, culture, and Christianity. Because religion is a stereotypically modern subject and since God is free to reveal himself in all ethoi, Barth is compelled to provide his understanding of this ubiquitous phenomenon as determined by his theology of revelation. Barth surmises that, if "we are going to know and acknowledge the revelation of God as revelation, then there is this general human element which we cannot avoid or call by any other name. It is always there even

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<sup>22</sup> *CD* I/2, 280-281.

<sup>23</sup> Green, "Changing the Religious," 478. Author's emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Trevor Hart, "Revelation," in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 38. Scholars who perceive Barth's theology as (proto-)postmodern are: Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); "Barth, modernity, and postmodernity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). For a response see: Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

apart from Christianity as one specific area of human competence, experience and activity, as one of the worlds within the world of men.”<sup>25</sup> However, if one were to conclude that Barth abstracts the Christian religion relative to all other religions, he is swift to argue for the solidarity of the Christian religion with other religions regardless of God’s revelation to it. For Barth, “‘Christianity’ or the ‘Christian religion’ is one predicate for a subject which may have other predicates. It is a species within a genus in which there may be other species [...] and from this standpoint it is singular but certainly not unique.”<sup>26</sup> Hence, Green is correct to state that Barth “stands with the secular theorists of his day, emphasizing that religion is to be studied historically and comparatively. Not only does [Barth] permit the relativizing of Christianity among the religions of the world but positively insists on it—and on theological grounds.”<sup>27</sup> However, one should be sceptical of Green’s further contention that “the relationship of theology and religious studies in contemporary North American academia is better suited to Barth’s understanding of their relationship than was his own European context, in which theology was (and still is) largely isolated from nontheological religious studies.”<sup>28</sup> The reticence for accepting Green’s conclusion stems from one of the cultural and intellectual hallmarks of modern-North American academia, which is the separation of theology as a confessional discipline from religious studies as a (supposedly) confession-less discipline. The latter approach employs a social-scientific methodology and empiricist epistemology in order to understand the various phenomena of world

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<sup>25</sup> *CD* I/2, 281.

<sup>26</sup> *CD* I/2, 281.

<sup>27</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 479.

<sup>28</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 479.

religions without making or aligning with theological faith-claims. Although there is no doubt over the historic and contemporary isolation of theology from religious studies (and *vice versa*) in its European context, it is doubted whether Barth's theology of religion would ultimately find a congenial home in any cultural-intellectual milieu as his theology of religion is inextricably tied to, because it is determined by, his theology of revelation, which is an unavoidable offence to the guild of religious studies. According to Greggs, "Barth's primary concern is to continue to discuss how to articulate the true subject of theology – revelation in all its uniqueness – in relation to the concrete and historical phenomenon of religion."<sup>29</sup> Although Barth was a theologian of his time his theology of religion still provides the church with a good hermeneutic of and for all religions (and especially Christianity), because religion(s) can only be understood in the light of God's self-revelation, which transcends in order to encompass all religion(s). Therefore, it is irresponsible to attempt to commandeer Barth's theology, especially his doctrines of revelation and religion, for any worldview or philosophy, as this would undermine these doctrines in particular, and his theology in general, by obscuring his understanding of religion in the light of revelation. Greggs states that, in §17 "Barth is offering a constructive engagement with the concept of religion, as a concept related to his true interest of theology and as religion pertains to that primary academic discipline."<sup>30</sup>

After acknowledging the universal phenomenon of religion Barth turns to discuss the further relativization of the Christian religion to other religions by

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<sup>29</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 24.

pointing to humanity's cultic, liturgical, and doctrinal multiplicities as evidence of its desire for the divine. Barth states that,

Always and even necessarily men seem to feel that they are confronted by definite forces which stand over their own life and that of the world and influence it. Even at the most primitive cultural levels they seem to be aware not only of nature but also of the spirit and of spirits and their operation. Human culture in general and human existence in detail seems always and everywhere to be related by men to something ultimate and decisive, which is at least a powerful rival to their own will and power.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Barth perceives the particular manifestation of this universal experience of the divine in the cottage industry of pictorial representations of god(s) in any and all cultures. For Barth, humanity's attempt to placate and domesticate this experience is seen in its "representation of the object and aim of the striving, or of the origin of the event, [which] has always and everywhere been compressed into pictures of deities, with almost always and everywhere the picture of a supreme and only deity more or less clearly visible in the background."<sup>32</sup> Barth then turns to the cultic-liturgical dimensions of religion and the various texts in which religious adherents have supposedly heard the voice(s) of the divine. Barth argues that, it "is difficult to find any time or place when man was not aware of his duty to offer worship to God or gods in the form of concrete cults [...] It is [also] difficult to find any time or place when it was not thought that the voice of the deity had been heard and that it ought to be asserted and its meaning investigated."<sup>33</sup> It is, therefore, without question that the Christian religion is also a religion because it manifests all the characteristic traits of a religion regardless of its use of Holy Scripture and even calling itself the people of God. Barth rhetorically asks: "even in its supreme and

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<sup>31</sup> *CD I/2*, 281-282.

<sup>32</sup> *CD I/2*, 282.

<sup>33</sup> *CD I/2*, 282.

finest forms, although it may be at the highest level, is not Christian ‘piety’ on the same scale as all other forms of piety? And what are the criteria by which the highest place is necessarily accorded to it?”<sup>34</sup> The Christian religion not only parallels, and at times mimics, other religions but also is another manifestation of the general morass of human religiosity with its cacophonous faith-claims clamoring for its share of loyal adherents. Osgood Cannon remarks that, “Barth notes that the presence of religion is virtually universal. [Humans] everywhere, and in all times, seem aware of God or gods, and engage in ritual. The major religions have produced scriptures similar to the Bible, and have developed teachings with themes similar to those in Christian doctrine.”<sup>35</sup>

After establishing the relativization of the Christian religion to all other religions Barth proceeds to explicate the relationship between religion and revelation in the Christian religion. Barth is unwilling to exposit the self-revealing God and the Christian religion in separately sealed loci because he sees their relationship as ordered, structured, and irreversible since God determines the limits and possibilities of the Christian religion. Carys Moseley states that, “Barth’s main point in this first section is that since the seventeenth century the relationship between revelation and religion has been reversed in theology so that revelation has been judged by rationalist criteria, rather than revelation being allowed to bring to bear a critical perspective on human religion.”<sup>36</sup> This is also why, according to Di Noia, Barth’s “most explicit discussion of this relationship occurs in regard to the Christian

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<sup>34</sup> CD I/2, 282.

<sup>35</sup> Cannon, *The Concept of Religion*, 106.

<sup>36</sup> Carys Moseley, *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125.

religion and takes a quite explicitly theological line. This is a further indication that what is at stake here is a strictly theological analysis of religion that has chiefly in view a problematic internal to Christian theology.”<sup>37</sup> Here Barth utilizes his paradoxical understanding of the hiddenness of God in the event of his self-revelation when he argues that, the “revelation of God is actually the presence of God and therefore the hiddenness of God in the world of human religion.”<sup>38</sup> The next sentence is infamously difficult to translate and this thesis sides with the re-translation which reads, “Because God reveals himself, the divine particular is hidden in a human universal, the divine content in a human form, and thus the *divinely unique* in something merely *humanly remarkable*.”<sup>39</sup> For Barth, God does not reveal himself in a supra-historical mode above world-occurrence but in the very acts, postures, rites, and histories of humans who attempt to experience the divine in their religiosity, albeit in a hidden way. Therefore, though humans (and especially Christians) may deem their respective religiosities as remarkable, it is only the divine uniqueness (i.e., the God of Jesus Christ) in relation to it that provides it with any possible meaning.

Although God is hidden in his self-revelation Barth believes that “God’s revelation to man, God Himself, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the incarnation of the Word, can be seen from this side too, in the hiddenness which

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<sup>37</sup> Di Noia, “Religion and Religions,” 246.

<sup>38</sup> *CD* I/2, 282.

<sup>39</sup> Barth, *On Religion*, 35. Author’s emphasis. The original translation reads: “By God’s revealing of Himself the divine particular is hidden in a human universal, the divine content in a human form, and therefore that which is divinely unique in something which is humanly only singular.” *CD* I/2, 282. The original German reads: “Indem Gott sich offenbart, verbirgt sich das göttlich Besondere in einem menschlich Allgemeinen, der göttliche Inhalt in einer menschlichen Form und also das göttlich Einzigartige in einem menschlich bloss Eigenartigen.” *KD* I/2, 307.



is obviously given to it along with its true humanity as a religious phenomenon[.]”<sup>40</sup>

However, Barth tempers this prior statement with dialectical sobriety because when God reveals himself within the realm of human religion he also runs the risk of being conflated and confused with (a) religion or even completely denied because of it.

Hence, for Barth, “we cannot avoid the fact that [God’s revelation] can also be regarded from a standpoint from which it may in certain circumstances be denied as God’s revelation. In fact, it can and must also be regarded as ‘Christianity,’ and therefore as religion, and therefore as man’s reality and possibility.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, in order

to understand religion correctly one must always begin with divine revelation and then move to human religion in the light of divine revelation because, according to

Bruce McCormack,

Human beings can know God only by being given a knowledge which corresponds to God’s Self-knowledge. This occurs in that human beings are given the eyes of faith with which to discern that which lies hidden [i.e., God] in the veil [i.e., religion]. Thus conceived, revelation is seen to have two moments: an objective moment (God veils himself in a creaturely medium) and a subjective moment (God gives us faith to know and understand what is hidden in the veil).<sup>42</sup>

The fact that God, in his self-revelation, is hidden in human religion (particularly the Christian religion) along with the concomitant threat of human misinterpretation of the irreversible relationship of the self-revealing God and the Christian religion, forces Barth to define clearly the problem of religion in theology, which is that the “problem of religion is simply a pointed expression of the problem of man in his encounter and communion with God.”<sup>43</sup> The perennial temptation for those inside

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<sup>40</sup> CD I/2, 283.

<sup>41</sup> CD I/2, 283.

<sup>42</sup> McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 110-111.

<sup>43</sup> CD I/2, 283.

and outside the walls of the Christian religion is, then, “to abandon their theme and object [i.e., the God of Jesus Christ] and to become hollow and empty, mere shadows of themselves.”<sup>44</sup> For Barth, the attempted reversal of the irreversible relationship of divine revelation and human religion is evidenced in one’s inaction and indecisiveness. In order to neutralize this threat, the Christian religion must diligently uphold its confession of the divine determination of religion by revelation or else it runs the risk of selling its birthright as the true religion. Green states that,

Because revelation assumes the historical and social form of religion, Barth maintains, theologians run the risk of misconstruing the *relationship* of revelation and religion, a risk to which they have in fact succumbed by reversing the proper priority. The problem is not that modern theology has attributed a religious character to revelation but rather that it has made religion into the criterion of revelation rather than the other way around. The theological task at hand is therefore to establish the priority of revelation over religion without denying the religious nature of revelation.<sup>45</sup>

However, even if the need to rectify the irreversible relationship between divine revelation and human religion were acknowledged, there still remains, for Barth, the possibility no one would not take this need seriously enough. For Barth there

is an obvious difference between regarding religion as *the* problem of theology and regarding it as only one problem in theology. There is an obvious difference between regarding the Church as a religious brotherhood and regarding it as a state in which even religion is “sublimated” in the most comprehensive sense of the word. There is an obvious difference between regarding faith as a form of human piety and regarding it as a form of the judgment and grace of God, which is naturally and most concretely with man’s piety in all its forms. That is the decision which has to be made.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, the threat of reversing the relationship between divine revelation and human religion became an entrenched reality in the church and academy as the seed was sown in the soil of the late-seventeenth/early-eighteenth

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<sup>44</sup> CD I/2, 283.

<sup>45</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 479. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>46</sup> CD I/2, 284. Translator’s emphasis.

century in post-reformation Protestant Orthodoxy, which inevitably came into full bloom in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Neo-Protestantism. In order for Barth to situate himself in contrast to his wayward theological contemporaries and provide a necessary corrective, he first demonstrates how they came to err by tracing the history of the reversal of the relationship between divine revelation and human religion. For Barth, the corrective lies in a retrieval of the theology of the sixteenth-century Protestant reformation, because “in its great representatives and outstanding tendencies what it has discerned and declared is not the religion of revelation but the revelation of religion.”<sup>47</sup> Before discussing the Protestant Reformers, however, Barth begins with Thomas Aquinas for whom the concept “religion” means thoroughly and exclusively Christian piety. Barth argues that “[w]hat we call [religion] seems then not to have been known by that name. And the concept of religion as a general concept, to which the Christian religion must be subordinated as one with others, was obviously quite foreign to him.”<sup>48</sup> Barth then proceeds to John Calvin who was influenced by the Renaissance and its recovery of *religio naturalis*. However, Calvin was not influenced to the point of reversing the relationship between religion and revelation as he, according to Barth, “was not conscious of making *christiana* the predicate of something human in a neutral and universal sense.”<sup>49</sup> In fact because Calvin was a scriptural theologian he resisted the perennial temptation to measure humanity by humanity and instead measured the religiosity of humanity—true and false—by the revelation of God. Calvin defines the true religion as, “faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing

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<sup>47</sup> CD I/2, 284.

<sup>48</sup> CD I/2, 284. For Aquinas’ discussion of religion see: *Summa Theologica* II.2, Q. 81f.

<sup>49</sup> CD I/2, 284.

reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law.”<sup>50</sup>

Whereas the emerging temptation was to interpret a particular religion within the universal phenomenon of religion, Calvin denied any innate capacity and desire of humanity to worship God apart from his self-revelation. According to Barth,

the concept of ‘religion’ as a universal and neutral form was unable to achieve any fundamental significance for Calvin’s conception and presentation of Christianity; rather, ‘religion’ for him is an entity ‘x’ that receives its content and its form only through being equated with Christianity – which means, however, that it is taken by revelation into itself and conformed to its pattern.<sup>51</sup>

In the light of his findings, Barth concludes how, in the post-Reformation era, the category of “religion” became loosed from its ontic and noetic moorings as understood in the light of the self-revelation of God. Although Barth appreciates many post-Reformation Protestant theologians remaining true to their confessional convictions, particularly their understanding of human religion as subordinate to and determined by divine revelation, he sees “an unambiguous hint at a general concept of religion which is known by virtue of the voice of conscience or of nature.”<sup>52</sup>

As Barth traces the reversal of divine revelation and human religion in the post-Reformation era he places the initial blame on the seemingly innocent and assumed necessary justification for the study of religion independent of revelation for the sake of intra-ecclesial and extra-confessional polemics. Di Noia states that,

Various developments contributed to the emergence of natural religion as a category independent of its setting in traditional theological anthropology. Prominent among them were the rise of rational religion in response to post-Reformation religious strife, and the emphasis on apologetics in response to sceptical critics of Christianity. Rationalists appealed to a natural religious core to counter religious factionalism, while believers appealed to inherent religious

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<sup>50</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Edited by John T. McNeil (Louisville: Westminster John Press, 1960), 43. (I.2.2).

<sup>51</sup> *On Religion*, 38.

<sup>52</sup> *CD I/2*, 285.

instincts to address religious scepticism. Together they succeeded in launching what was might well be called the independent career of natural religion.<sup>53</sup>

Barth continues by tracing the thought of certain theologians and their increasing reversal of the relationship between divine revelation and human religion when he arrives at and places the final blame on the respective theologies of Saloman van Til (1643-1713) and J. Franz Buddeus (1667-1729). In the theologies of van Til and Buddeus the reversal of divine revelation and human religion finally manifests for, according to Barth, “Dogmatics [could] now begin quite openly and unilaterally [...] with the presupposition of the concept and the description of a general and natural and neutral ‘religion.’”<sup>54</sup> Whereas theologians since Aquinas had maintained an uncompromising ontic and noetic contingency of human religion upon divine revelation, either in part or in whole, with van Til and Buddeus the distinction between divine revelation and human religion became a division. This division, however, was not simply to liberate the study of human religion from the supposed shackles of divine revelation but was an attempted reversal of the irreversibly determined relationship of divine revelation and human religion. According to Barth, after van Til and Buddeus, divine revelation “has now actually become a predicate of the neutral and universal human element [...] and] a historical confirmation of what man can know about himself and therefore about God even apart from revelation.”<sup>55</sup> Barth believes the innovations of van Til and Buddeus are influential on all subsequent discussions, and even though he graciously absolves van Til and Buddeus from any malicious intent for the later aberrations (and

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<sup>53</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 247. Barth mentions that this seemingly benign venture could also prove worthy against atheists regarding the veracity of scripture and against the papacy (*CD I/2*, 285).

<sup>54</sup> *CD I/2*, 288.

<sup>55</sup> *CD I/2*, 289-290.

blasphemies) of theologians and philosophers of religion in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, they ultimately provided the convenient impetus and desired respectability for the “Neo-Protestants” such as Schleiermacher, Strauss, Hegel, Ritschl, and Troeltsch (not to mention atheists like Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche) in their attempt to construct an independent theology/philosophy of religion that determines, or at a minimum attempts to exclude initially, divine revelation. Barth summarizes this historical interlude by stating that,

All these more or less radical and destructive movements in the history of theology in the last two centuries [i.e., nineteenth and twentieth] are simply variations on one simple theme, and that theme was clearly introduced by van Til and Buddeus: that religion has not to be understood in the light of revelation, but revelation in the light of religion. To this common denominator the aims and the programmes of all the more important tendencies of modern theology can be reduced. Neo-Protestantism means “religionism.”[...] It shows that at the end of the period which started with Buddeus [and van Til] theology had lost any serious intention of taking itself seriously as theology.<sup>56</sup>

In order to correct this reversal of divine revelation and human religion Barth believes the church must not merely react to or even condone the actions of the Neo-Protestants because, “What serves and helps the Church is not to soften or weaken the heresy which has infiltrated into it, but to know it, to fight it and to isolate it.”<sup>57</sup> Barth perceives the reversal of divine revelation and human religion as not only ironic but tragic because even though Neo-Protestants claim their view of divine revelation and human religion is a result of (supposedly) free investigation, it is actually clear evidence of their capitulation to the spirit of the age. Barth states that,

It is not because they are novel and dangerous, but because in fact they certainly are not the results of free, theological investigation of truth, that they can and should be opposed, radically and seriously opposed. The opposition must be

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<sup>56</sup> *CD* I/2, 290-291.

<sup>57</sup> *CD* I/2, 292.

directed—not contrary to the free investigation of truth but for the sake of it—against the point at which the results arise and emerge.<sup>58</sup>

Barth further juxtaposes the Neo-Protestants with the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers who constructed their theology not in freedom from all authorities but in freedom for their authoritative object of inquiry – Jesus Christ. Whereas the Neo-Protestants implicitly deny (in practice) the confessions of the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers take their object of inquiry seriously and courageously. According to Barth,

their theological thinking as such could always be free, free for its own inexhaustible object. It meant that having that object, it would remain true to itself. It did not need any other attractions or distractions or enslavements from alien points of view. Their theological thinking had the freedom of unconditioned relevance: the freedom of faith, we must say because this unconditioned relevance was none other than that of faith.<sup>59</sup>

As Barth continues his diagnosis of and prescription for the problem of the reversal of divine revelation and human religion he corrects a common misconception concerning the Neo-Protestant engagement with modernity as not one of participation and dialogue but capitulation. For Barth, Neo-Protestantism “fell prey to the absolutism with which the man of that period made himself the centre and measure and goal of all things. It was its duty to participate in this trend and lovingly investigate it. But it was certainly not its duty to cooperate in it, which is what it did when in the time of Buddeus [and van Til] it openly turned ‘religionistic.’”<sup>60</sup> Barth points to the Lutheran and Reformed confessions as a litmus test to evaluate the theological conclusions of the Neo-Protestants because, in their reversal of divine revelation and human religion, the latter openly denied in practice what they said to

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<sup>58</sup> *CD* I/2, 292.

<sup>59</sup> *CD* I/2, 293.

<sup>60</sup> *CD* I/2, 293.

affirm in theory. Rather than confessing and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord over and in the constructing and ordering of their theology, particularly their theology of religion, the Neo-Protestants shipwrecked their faith in the self-revealing God. According to Barth, they “really lost revelation [as] shown by the very fact that [they] could exchange it, and with it [their] own birthright, for the concept ‘religion.’”<sup>61</sup> Whereas Barth believes the necessary asymmetrical and irreversibly determined relationship between divine revelation and human religion should have been upheld, Neo-Protestant theologians succumbed to apologetic anxiety, epistemic hubris, and the ironic tragedy of not taking the discipline of theology serious enough. This led to the enslaving of their (so-called) free investigation and a forfeiting of the true and proper understanding of the relationship between the self-revealing God and the religious human. According to Barth, “the difficulty here is not so much with the emergence of the category of religion as such, but with the normative role that this category has come to play in neo-Protestant theology.”<sup>62</sup>

Barth then makes a side comment on the nature and limitations of the modern study of religion. With the rise of the Enlightenment and the corresponding separation of divine revelation from human religion, the study of religion emerged and began to compete with traditional theology for an understanding of human religion; and although Barth does not appreciate this competition and attempted usurpation by the so-called scientists of religion, he accords a rightful place to the religious scientists but always within the inherent limitations of their field of study when he argues that a “‘pure’ science of religion is one which does not make any

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<sup>61</sup> *CD I/2*, 294.

<sup>62</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 248.



claim to be theology.”<sup>63</sup> In the light of this axiom Barth finds the negative limitation of the science of religion in its practitioners’ assumption that one can understand a particular religion (e.g., Christianity) without any existential commitment to and participation in that religion. In particular, these scientists demonstrate their total lack of the knowledge of the Christian religion for, according to Barth, “genuine respect would necessarily involve a quite different procedure. [And the] purer the science of religion becomes, the more it drinks in that sea of religious realities (in which the phenomenon of revelation is only too plentiful), and the more it is reduced *ad absurdum*.”<sup>64</sup> However, Barth also sees a positive limitation to the science of religion in its practitioners’ thoughtfulness relative to the misguided synthesis and reversal of divine revelation and human religion as performed by the Neo-Protestant theologians of religion. According to Barth, in the light of divine revelation we

must still describe [the science of religion’s] procedure as more sober and instructive and promising than the adulterated science of religion of theologians who, on the one hand, usually spoil the peaceful course of this investigation of religious realities by suddenly taking account of a religious truth of revelation, and, on the other, give evidence, by the philosophical standards of assessment and value which they apply, that they are dealing with something which they are in no position either to understand or to take seriously.<sup>65</sup>

With Barth’s understanding of the scientific study of religion settled his definition of a theology of religion emerges more clearly, especially as he endeavours to solve the problem of religion in theology. According to Di Noia, “theology has its distinct character as an intellectual discipline precisely in virtue of the field of knowledge

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<sup>63</sup> *CD* I/2, 295.

<sup>64</sup> *CD* I/2, 295. The “different procedure” that Barth alludes to is one of faith and confession with the consequent practical ordering of one’s theology in accordance with their confession of faith.

<sup>65</sup> *CD* I/2, 295.

that is opened up for it by the grace of divine revelation.”<sup>66</sup> For Barth, the relationship between divine revelation and human religion must be wholly determined by the revelation of God because, according to Di Noia, “Human religiosity, natural religion, and the world of religions become objects of a properly (Barth would say ‘uninterruptedly’) theological inquiry only when they are viewed within the field or domain illumined by the light of revelation, and not vice versa.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, one cannot assume to investigate or analyze divine revelation as an abstract concept severed from the God who is known only in the unidirectional event of self-revelation; nor can one begin with religion and suppose they will inevitably know God apart from his self-revelation for, as Cannon contends,

According to Barth a fully theological analysis of religion will always involve an “either-or,” that is, the theologian must choose either revelation or religion. Where co-ordination between the two is attempted, where revelation and religion are conceived as two equal spheres, there revelation itself is simply misunderstood. The theologian must begin with an a priori commitment to the superiority of revelation or otherwise the war is lost at the outset.<sup>68</sup>

Because it is impossible to comprehend human religion correctly independent of divine revelation, Barth is adamant that the asymmetrical relationship between divine revelation and human religion be upheld, and he delineates his methodology by stating that,

There can, therefore, be no question of a systematic co-ordination of God and man, of revelation and religion. For neither in its existence, nor in its relation to the first, can the second be considered, let alone defined, except in the light of the first. The only thing we can do is to recount the history of the relationships between the two: and even that takes place in such a way that whatever we have to say about the existence and nature and value of the second can only and

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<sup>66</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 248.

<sup>67</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 248.

<sup>68</sup> Cannon, *The Concept of Religion*, 109.

exclusively be made plain in the light of the first, i.e., in the course of God's sovereign action on man.<sup>69</sup>

With Barth's prior narration of the degeneration of the relationship between divine revelation and human religion complete and his methodology disclosed to solve the problem of religion in theology, he points to the content of God in his self-revelation – Jesus Christ. According to Green, Barth "Proceed[s] narratively rather than systematically [and] by applying the 'christological concentration,' [he] discovers the appropriate analogy for relating religion and revelation in the incarnation of Christ."<sup>70</sup> The incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ provides Barth with a fitting analogy for how God relates to human religion when he argues that, "The unity of God and man in Jesus Christ is the unity of a completed event. Similarly the unity of divine revelation and human religion is that of an event—although in this case it has still to be completed. As God is the subject of the one event, so, too, He is of the other."<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the incarnation of the Son of God contains another useful doctrine for Barth – the anhypostasis of the humanity of Jesus Christ. Although Barth does not use this exact term, it is contended that he implicitly utilizes it to correct the inverted relationship between divine revelation and human religion.

According to Barth,

The man Jesus has no prior or abstract existence in the one event [i.e., incarnation] but exists only in the unity of that event, whose Subject is the Word of God and therefore God Himself: very God and very Man. Similarly in the other, man and his religion is to be considered only as the one who follows God because God has preceded the man who hears Him, because he is addressed by God.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *CD I/2*, 296.

<sup>70</sup> Green, "Challenging the Religious," 479.

<sup>71</sup> *CD I/2*, 297.

Barth concludes §17.1 by reiterating the problem of human religion in theology as the difficulty in discerning exactly how and where God is present and yet not confusing and conflating God with or collapsing him into any/every human religion. Greggs contends that, “Barth recognizes the place of humans in the reception of revelation, and – as a collective and historical entity – the place of religion. Barth does not feel that the category of religion can be ignored in discussing revelation.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, Barth argues that his theology of religion

is basically a matter of re-establishing the order of the concepts revelation and religion in such a way that the relation between them becomes comprehensible again as identical with that event between God and man in which God is *God* – that is, the Lord and Master of which man is *God’s man* – that is, the one who is accepted and received by God through his severity and goodness.<sup>74</sup>

Once the correct relationship between divine revelation and human religion has been acknowledged one’s understanding of religion, particularly the Christian religion, is fundamentally altered. Thus, Di Noia is correct when he contends, “when Barth insists that religion be set within the properly theological context defined by divine revelation, it becomes clear that the grace of revelation entails the sublation of [the Christian] religion.”<sup>75</sup> However, before Barth can conclude that only one religion (i.e., Christianity) is the true religion he must first argue why all religions (including the true one) are faithlessness.

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<sup>72</sup> *CD I/2*, 297. Barth’s use of the anhypostasis of the human Jesus will be discussed more thoroughly in the divine creation of the Christian religion at the end of this chapter and in chapter two.

<sup>73</sup> Greggs, *Theology*, 27.

<sup>74</sup> *On Religion*, 52. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>75</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 248. Di Noia prefers “sublation” to “sublimation.” For a discussion on the relative differences and argument for “sublimation” see: *On Religion*, ix.

## **THE FAITHLESSNESS OF RELIGION**

After explaining the problem of religion in theology in §17.1, Barth provides in §17.2 a theological account of religion in the light of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ in the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Green remarks that the

first of the three parts comprising Barth's treatment of religion has set the stage for the dialectic of religion and revelation by positing the thesis that revelation necessarily assumes a religious form in the human world, and that Christianity is therefore a religion. Part two now calls it radically into question by developing the antithesis: that religion is the faithless attempt to deny God's self-revelation.<sup>76</sup>

Barth's desired methodological posture is humility in contrast to many Christian theologians and philosophers of religion who have been and still are much too arrogant in their dismissive tone and posture towards other religions not their own.

Barth believes any "theological evaluation of religion and religions must be characterised primarily by the great cautiousness and charity of its assessment and judgments. It will observe and understand and take man in all seriousness as the subject of religion. But it will not be man apart from God, in a human, *per se*."<sup>77</sup>

Since the human cannot be understood as religious in abstraction from God it begs the question how the human relates to God and whether or not she knows and understands this relation. For Barth, however, this is only a penultimate concern because a proper theological evaluation of religion will ultimately concern the one "for whom (whether he knows it or not) Jesus Christ was born, died and rose again.

It will be man who (whether he has already heard it or not) is intended in the Word of God. It will be man who (whether he is aware of it or not) has in Christ his Lord."<sup>78</sup> Only the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the means by which the

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<sup>76</sup> *On Religion*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> *CD I/2*, 297.

religious human can understand herself aright as faithlessly religious and yet sublimated by the self-revelation of God. This is the positive demarcation of the religious human as determined by Jesus Christ. The negative demarcation is the source to which we must not look – human (religious) nature. Although van Til, Buddeus, and those who follow their example attempt to abstract human religion from divine revelation and understand it solely on anthropological terms, their attempt is, according to Barth, futile “because a prior definition of the ‘nature’ of the phenomena in this sphere is either impossible or in itself irrelevant, [therefore] what we have to know of the nature of religion from the standpoint of God’s revelation does not allow us to make any but the most incidental use of an immanent definition of the nature of religion.”<sup>79</sup>

Barth then makes a preemptive strike against those who believe the Christian religion is the true religion based upon the assumed fact that it is the truest, highest, and most evolved religion in contrast to other lesser-evolved, degenerate, or wholly false religions. In contrast to this evolutionary understanding of the Christian religion relative to all other religions Barth remarks that,

Revelation singles out the Church as the *locus* of true religion [*als der Stätte der wahren Religion*]. But this does not mean that the Christian religion as such is the fulfilled nature of human religion. It does not mean that the Christian religion is the true religion, fundamentally superior to all other religions [....] We cannot differentiate and separate the Church from other religions on the basis of a general concept of the nature of religion.<sup>80</sup>

The Christian religion, therefore, cannot point to and proclaim any innate superiority of its religious nature but must testify how God condemns it to sublimate it.

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<sup>78</sup> CD I/2, 297.

<sup>79</sup> CD I/2, 298.

<sup>80</sup> CD I/2, 298; KD I/2, 325.

Moreover, in developing a theological account of religion as determined solely by divine revelation Barth argues for a true tolerance, particularly by the Christian religion, in order to understand religion. Even though Barth will argue for the Christian religion as the true religion this does not provide it with a license to be condescending towards other religions. For Barth, “this tolerance must not be confused with the moderation of those who actually have their own religion or religiosity, and are secretly zealous for it, but who can exercise self-control, because they have told themselves or have been told that theirs is not the only faith, that fanaticism is a bad thing, that love must always have the first and last word.”<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, true tolerance “must not be confused with the relativism and impartiality of an historical scepticism, which does not ask about truth and untruth in the field of religious phenomena, because it thinks that truth can be known only in the form of its own doubt about all truth.”<sup>82</sup> Although these approaches may seem to engage respectfully with religion generally and the religious human specifically, they are ultimately dehumanizing and thereby demean the object under consideration for, ironically, tolerance as “moderation, or superior knowledge, or scepticism is actually the worst form of intolerance.”<sup>83</sup> Only Jesus Christ reveals true tolerance as seen in his forbearance towards faithless, religious humanity for, as Barth argues,

religion and religions must be treated with a tolerance which is informed by the forbearance of Christ, which derives therefore from the knowledge that by grace God has reconciled to Himself godless man and his religion. It will see man carried, like an obstinate child in the arms of its mother, by what God has determined and done for his salvation in spite of his own opposition.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *CD I/2*, 299.

<sup>82</sup> *CD I/2*, 299.

<sup>83</sup> *CD I/2*, 299.

<sup>84</sup> *CD I/2*, 299.

After providing his methodology, Barth defines religion as *Unglaube*. Here the stance in the introduction to this thesis is reiterated in which it disagrees with the original translation of *Unglaube* as “unbelief” preferring rather “faithlessness” because Barth argues that humans as religious do not merely lack faith but are, ironically and tragically, faithless to God precisely in being faithful to the “god(s)” of their self-devised religiosity. Green argues that,

In characterizing religion as *Unglaube*, Barth has in mind not primarily ‘beliefs’ or doctrines but rather a lack of *faith*, in the Reformation sense of *fiducia*, trust or confidence in the promises of God. Religion, Barth is saying, is an expression of faithlessness, the proclivity of human beings to disbelieve God’s assurance of salvation in Christ and to rely instead on their own resources.<sup>85</sup>

Before Barth argues why religion is faithlessness he introduces a caveat wherein he attacks the naïve and overly negative stance towards all religiosity by affirming the relative accomplishments of human religions. Barth believes his definition of religion as faithlessness “aims only to repeat the judgment of God, it does not involve any human renunciation of human values, any contesting of the true and the good and the beautiful which a closer inspection will reveal in almost all religions, and which we naturally expect to find in abundant measure in [the Christian] religion, if we hold to it with any conviction.”<sup>86</sup> Since it is no more righteous to tear down religious buildings and destroy their trappings than to build and furnish them in the light of the judgment of God on religion, one must have a mature understanding of religion, which includes its finery, finitude, and faithlessness. According to Barth, the judgment of God on religion

does not challenge us to a venal and childish resignation in face of what is humanly great, but to an adult awareness of its real and ultimate limits, which do not have to be fixed by us but are already fixed. In the sphere of reverence before

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<sup>85</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 480. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>86</sup> *CD* I/2, 300.



God, there must always be a place for reverence for human greatness. It does not lie under our judgment, but under the judgment of God.<sup>87</sup>

Fashioned with a Christ-like tolerance and mature perception of the inherent limitations and accomplishments of religion under the judgment of God, Barth provides two premises for defining religion as faithlessness. The first premise believes the religious human can only know God in his self-revelation, which excludes any possibility of knowing God in and through her religion. Barth argues that, “Revelation encounters man on the presupposition and in confirmation of the fact that man’s attempts to know God from his own standpoint are wholly and entirely futile; not because of any necessity in principle, but because of a practical necessity of fact.”<sup>88</sup> Because God is the active subject in his revelation, the religious human is utterly incapable (and wholly unwilling) of knowing God; for even if the possibility exists for the religious human to know God she does not desire to, as she would then have to acknowledge that God first and always knows her before she knows God. Thus, Di Noia is correct to state that,

Human religiosity, according to Barth, is judged by revelation to be the absence or lack of faith: not simply an unwillingness to assent to certain truths, but an unwillingness to yield to the saving power of divine grace and revelation, and to surrender all those purely human attempts to know and satisfy God which together comprise human religion and religiosity.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, Barth juxtaposes a faithless with a faithful human when he states that a “genuine believer will not say that he came to faith from faith, but from [faithlessness] even though the attitude and activity with which he met revelation,

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<sup>87</sup> *CD* I/2, 301.

<sup>88</sup> *CD* I/2, 301.

<sup>89</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 250.

and still meets it, is religion.”<sup>90</sup> Whether or not God sublimates a religious human in his self-revelation she remains faithless, and yet even though she is faithless to God, God is faithful to her in Jesus Christ. Moreover, faithlessness manifests as idolatry in all of its mental and material modes. Matthew Myer Boulton contends that, “for Barth, religion amounts to the human attempt not only to self-justify, but also to contrive and erect a counterfeit divine image, and in that sense a counterfeit God. [Even] theology itself – to the extent that it takes up the religious task – is a sham, a fraudulent if sometimes spectacular exercise in the human invention of God.”<sup>91</sup> With his theology of idolatry rooted within and informed by the Reformed tradition Barth reiterates Calvin’s dictum regarding the human heart as a “factory of idols,” which is seen in the absurd audacity of the religious human’s attempt to predict and fabricate God in her own image; and yet, in the light of the self-revelation of God, this is exposed, contradicted, and overcome. Barth contends that,

From the standpoint of revelation religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in His revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and wilfully evolved by man.<sup>92</sup>

The religious human does not always contradict the self-revealing God in outright public rejection (though this occurs); rather, in the indefatigable and more pernicious attempt to re-order the proper relationship between divine revelation and human religion she attempts to co-ordinate and subordinate the self-revealing God to her religious constructs. However, according to Barth, it is impossible to “interpret [this] attempt as a harmonious co-operating of man with the revelation of God, as though

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<sup>90</sup> *CD I/2*, 302.

<sup>91</sup> Boulton, *God Against Religion*, 58.

<sup>92</sup> *CD I/2*, 302.

religion were a kind of outstretched hand which is filled by God in His revelation.”<sup>93</sup> Although it appears the religious human is justified in her piety of co-operating and aligning herself with God, the underlying duplicity is her desire to reverse the proper order of divine revelation and human religion in order to dominate and domesticate this self-contrived deity for her own ends. As Barth states, “In religion man bolts and bars himself against revelation by providing a substitute, by taking away in advance the very thing which has to be given by God.”<sup>94</sup> According to Di Noia this occurs because religious humans with their “conceptions of the deity and schemes of salvation – the bread and butter of human religion – have their sights set on an objective that is simply not within range: they can neither attain to a true knowledge of God nor deliver the salvation they promise.”<sup>95</sup> This why, for Barth, the true knowledge of God is only given in his self-revelation meaning religious humans must receive it as a gift. According to Timothy Gorringer, if one’s “knowledge of God is not acknowledged [as] a gift then it becomes a contravention of the first commandment through the production of idols.”<sup>96</sup>

The second premise of Barth’s argument for religion as faithlessness builds upon the first because only by the self-revelation of God can one know why they did not, cannot, and will not know God in their religiosity. However, according to Green, the self-revelation of God is not only a “No!” to the religious human but ultimately a victorious “Yes!” “by which God through grace reconciles humanity to

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<sup>93</sup> *CD* I/2, 303.

<sup>94</sup> *CD* I/2, 303.

<sup>95</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 250.

<sup>96</sup> Timothy Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141.

himself. Since the practical aim of all human religious activity is self-justification and self-sanctification, it constitutes a barrier that must first be removed before people can receive revelation, which comes only by grace.”<sup>97</sup> The reconciliation of the religious human with God in Jesus Christ overcomes the conceptual and material idolatry of the religious human along with all her futile attempts at self-justification. Barth states that,

Jesus Christ does not fill out and improve all the different [idolatrous] attempts of man to think of God and to represent Him according to his own standard. But as the self-offering and self-manifestation of God He replaces and completely outbids those attempts, putting them in the shadows to which they belong. Similarly, in so far as God reconciles the world to Himself in Him, He replaces all the different attempts of man to reconcile God to the world, all our human efforts at justification and sanctification, at conversion and salvation. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ maintains that our justification and sanctification, our conversion and salvation, have been brought about and achieved once and for all in Jesus Christ.<sup>98</sup>

One might even speculate that the religious human could completely jettison her religiosity in the light of the revelation of the reconciliation accomplished by God in Jesus Christ; and yet, even though the religious human is confronted by this truth and her pseudo-existence exposed as an impossible possibility, religion still persists. Moreover, Barth contends that “there is also an immanent problematic of religion that must be understood in its own right and is to be distinguished as such from the sublimation of religion by revelation.”<sup>99</sup> This “immanent problematic” is the religious human’s insatiable need to correct or modify her religiosity in order to justify herself. Barth provides his description of a religious human endeavouring to repair her faulty religiosity from her own resources when he states that,

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<sup>97</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 480.

<sup>98</sup> *CD I/2*, 308.

<sup>99</sup> *On Religion*, 72.

In his striving, then, he involves himself in a peculiar inward dialectic. He strangely contradicts himself. He scores through his thinking and willing, and uplifts and outbids it by a thinking and willing which he believes to be higher and better. In this way he necessarily calls himself in[to] question, unsettling himself and plunging himself into uncertainty. But he also jeopardises more or less radically the whole of his religious activity – although without abandoning the religious attitude and appetite – but also without directing it to its real goal in this new and critical turn in the matter.<sup>100</sup>

Because religion is faithlessness it cannot sublimate itself even if it wanted to; moreover, it cannot know this apart from divine revelation, which means it cannot find an internal solution to its faithlessness. According to Barth, “we have to note that the critical turn at which the self-contradiction and impossibility [of religion] are brought out is itself a moment in the life of religion. It has only an immanent significance. It does not give any ultimate or definitive answer to the question which it tries to answer.”<sup>101</sup> The possibility of confusing the internal struggle of the religious human in her attempt to overcome her religious shortcomings by new religious ideals and practices with the revelation of God is a continual threat to a valid theological understanding of religion. This is why, for Barth, a religion’s internal problem “must not be confused with revelation. It does not show religion to be [faithlessness]. For it falls under the same judgment. Even at the supposedly higher level where it tries to overcome idolatry and self-righteousness in its own strength and its own way, religion is still idolatry and self-righteousness.”<sup>102</sup> Barth then discusses how religion is ultimately a non-necessity even if the religious human assumes it is, which is why religion “always tends toward a critical turning point, a crisis that occurs whenever the attempted religious projection fails, driving human

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<sup>100</sup> *CD I/2*, 314.

<sup>101</sup> *CD I/2*, 314.

<sup>102</sup> *CD I/2*, 314.

beings in one of two directions: mysticism or atheism.”<sup>103</sup> This is why Barth believes his “task [is] to show that even in these two supposedly higher and apparently inimical forms, whether in good or evil, in failure or success, religion is still thoroughly self-centred.”<sup>104</sup>

According to Barth mysticism and atheism are two similar “religions” for, inasmuch as their adherents attempt to free themselves from the bonds of formally organized religion, the necessity remains for the mystic and atheist to relate to religion, albeit in a negative way. The mystic and atheist function parasitically upon religion in order to justify themselves in their contradictory posture towards religion, meaning they can never rid themselves of their religiosity since they are being religious although in a negative mode. Therefore, whether as mystical or atheistic human religion is, according to Green, “both inevitable and futile, leading to a sterile cycle of religious affirmation, crisis, and breakdown, followed by the outbreak of new religious movements condemned to repeat the process.”<sup>105</sup> Barth begins with mysticism and defines it as “practically and basically [renouncing all] religion as regards its expression, externalisation and manifestation. [The mystic does] not think that [she] will find truth in its conception of God, or salvation and assurance in obedience to its law.”<sup>106</sup> In the history of human religion there have been no lack of mystics, particularly in the Christian religion, and in his assessment of mysticism relative to religion Barth critiques mysticism’s self-definition over-and-against formal, organized religion. Deceptively, mysticism “does not attack religion openly

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<sup>103</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 481.

<sup>104</sup> *CD* I/2, 315.

<sup>105</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 481.

<sup>106</sup> *CD* I/2, 318-319.

and directly. It does not negate it. It is not interested in iconoclasm or the refutation of dogmas or other open acts of liberation. It subjects itself to the prevailing doctrine and observance, and even respects it. It leaves religion in peace.”<sup>107</sup> Mysticism covertly subverts religion all the while remaining dependent upon it. In the mystic’s turn to the interiority of religion she “insists upon interpreting everything that is taught and practised in any particular religion according to its inward and spiritual and vital meaning, i.e., in relation to the reality of that formless and unrealised vacuum, and not in any abstract externality.”<sup>108</sup> For the mystic, a religion’s externality is its mere trappings and hollow representations because “the transitory is only a parable, [because] its truth is only in its relation to the inexpressible, because undirected, essence from which it proceeded and to which it must also revert.”<sup>109</sup> Barth believes the tragic irony of mysticism lies in its glaring dependence upon religion even though it supposedly has matured and no longer needs it. Even though the mystic assumes religion functions as merely propaedeutic and can be discarded when one comes of spiritual age, they still have

a sincere affection for the whole system of external religion. That is, he has an affection for it because he needs it. It is the text for his interpretations. It is the material for his spiritualising. It is the external of which he has to show the inward meaning. It is the point of departure for the great withdrawal, on which, as he thinks, a knowledge of the truth will be achieved.<sup>110</sup>

For Barth, mysticism is a seemingly congenial and sublime negation of all things religious, particularly the external, empirical, and structural; and yet if formal

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<sup>107</sup> *CD* I/2, 319.

<sup>108</sup> *CD* I/2, 319.

<sup>109</sup> *CD* I/2, 319.

<sup>110</sup> *CD* I/2, 319-320.

religion, with all its externalities, would cease to exist then so would the mystic whose sole purpose is to negate it.

Having demonstrated that mysticism, in its negative turn against religion, cannot extricate itself from religion but can only further weld itself to it Barth then turns to the unimaginative and juvenile expression of anti-religious religiosity – atheism. Unlike the seemingly amiable relation of mysticism to religion, “Atheism means a babbling out of the secret that so far as this turn [against religion] involves anything at all it involves only a negation.”<sup>111</sup> However, relative to mysticism, atheism has the same positive goal, “which is religious reality in that formless and unrealised vacuum, where knowledge and object are or again become one and the same thing – the Chinese *Tao*, the Indian *Tat tvam asi*, Hegel’s in-and-for-itself of the absolute Spirit.”<sup>112</sup> Atheism, however, diverges from mysticism in its outward expressions because, whereas mysticism respectfully relates to its host religion, atheism “hurls itself against religion in open conflict. It loves iconoclasm, the refutation of dogmas, and, of course, moral emancipation. It denies the existence of God and the validity of divine law. And its whole interest is in the denial as such. That is its artlessness.”<sup>113</sup> According to Barth, the reason for this more boisterous attack on religion is because atheism

fails to see what mysticism does not fail to see: that absolute denial can have no meaning except against the background of a relative affirmation. A herd cannot be periodically slaughtered, unless it is continually fed and tended, or at any rate kept in being. Atheism lives in and by its negation. It can only break down and take away, and therefore it is exposed to the constant danger of finishing at a dead end.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> CD I/2, 320.

<sup>112</sup> CD I/2, 320.

<sup>113</sup> CD I/2, 321.



The distinction, but not division, between mysticism and atheism is enhanced when Barth argues how atheism is much more fervent in negation and yet more parochial in its interpretive scope. For Barth, atheism “is satisfied to deny God and His law. [And yet it] fails to see that, apart from religion, there are other dogmas of truth and ways of certainty, which may at any moment take on a religious character.”<sup>115</sup> Stemming from atheism’s adolescent approach to religion Barth levels a final and more serious charge against it. Whereas mysticism will initially relate to religion more positively, “Atheism nearly always means secularism. And more than that, atheism usually allies itself with these secular authorities and powers in the conflict with religion, with God and His law.”<sup>116</sup> In its desire for the total abnegation of religion atheism “exposes itself to the danger that all kinds of new and disguised, and sometimes not so disguised, religions may arise behind its back and wherever possible with its support.”<sup>117</sup> This is why, in Green’s interpretation of Barth, atheism is perceived to be the stronger, anti-religious religion relative to mysticism and yet it will never ultimately succeed because “sheer negation is not only sterile but clears the way for new divinities to arise.”<sup>118</sup> Even in the extremes of its mystical and atheistic forms the negative turn against religion cannot be ultimately accomplished for “in its mystical form it cannot avoid combining its denial with a naturally not at all naïve affirmation, but an affirmation all the same. And if it tries to [accomplish] this in its atheistic form, unwillingly but in fact it cannot avoid, if not preparing, at

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<sup>114</sup> *CD* I/2, 321.

<sup>115</sup> *CD* I/2, 321.

<sup>116</sup> *CD* I/2, 321.

<sup>117</sup> *CD* I/2, 321.

<sup>118</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 481.

least opening up, a wide field for new religious constructs.”<sup>119</sup> Barth’s theological evaluation of religion as faithlessness must be understood as exposing the power of religion as impotence. The mystic, atheist, and all those who fight against religion in their indefatigable attempts to rid themselves of religion are, according to Barth, “really opposed to religion only as the spring is to the river, as the root to the tree, as the unborn child in the womb to the adult.”<sup>120</sup> It is this vicious circle of despising, yet ever depending upon, religion that creates a “magic circle,” which is broken, rendered powerless, and ultimately sublimated in the event of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, because the “real crisis of religion can only break in from outside the magic circle of religion and its place of origin, i.e., from outside man.”<sup>121</sup> Moreover, this also prevents a particular religion from vaunting itself over all other religions and presuming to pronounce a divinely authorised judgment upon them. Di Noia declares that, for Barth,

the judgment that all religion is [faithlessness] is strictly a divine judgment rendered by revelation itself and knowable only by the grace of faith. This judgment is emphatically not one that is pronounced upon the world of non-Christian religions by Christianity nor its representatives. Nor is it an empirical judgment, such as might result from the study and assessment of the various social forms and institutions in which human religiosity has expressed itself.<sup>122</sup>

Thus this exegesis of Barth’s theological critique of religion as faithlessness ends at the place where he began – Jesus Christ, and Gregg is correct when he states that

it is Jesus Christ who is the only basis on which one can identify religion as idolatrous and self-righteous: He is the one who exposes religion as [faithlessness]. Because Barth’s critique of religion is pursued from a christological perspective, it is clear that for him the only real critique can come

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<sup>119</sup> *CD* I/2, 323.

<sup>120</sup> *CD* I/2, 324.

<sup>121</sup> *CD* I/2, 324.

<sup>122</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 250.

from Christ, and all other versions of this critique (even theological ones) fail: neither mysticism nor atheism can deal appropriately with religion precisely because of this. It is Jesus who reveals religion to be idolatrous, self-righteous and self-centred.<sup>123</sup>

And yet Barth's theology of religion is not finished as one religion is sublimated.

### **THE REDEMPTION OF RELIGION**

In §17.3 Barth completes his theological treatment of religion, particularly how one religion is sublimated in the event of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. After wading through his critique of religion in §17.2 ("Religion as Faithlessness") one could conclude Barth finds nothing positive to say about any religion (even the Christian religion), and yet the reader is immediately confronted with the surprising title of "The True Religion."<sup>124</sup> However, scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith still perceive a solely negative interpretation of religion by Barth, when he states that, "Among Christians, the best known [critic of religion] is Karl Barth, [who is] perhaps the Church's most prophetic contemporary voice. He has devoted in his most substantial work a vigorous section to the topic 'The Abolition of Religion'. 'Religion', he proclaims flatly, 'is unbelief'... 'and unbelief... is sin'.<sup>125</sup> And yet even though all religions are faithless, Barth believes God sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion. Di Noia remarks that, "In this context, the dialectical character of the *Aufhebung*, or sublation, of religion

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<sup>123</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 28.

<sup>124</sup> This thesis disagrees with the original translation of "Die Wahre Religion" as simply "True Religion" and instead prefers to include the definite article, as Barth does not argue that "true religion" can exist in or be possessed by any religion, but that there is only *one* true religion – Christianity. See *On Religion*, viii-ix.

<sup>125</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 125.

by revelation becomes apparent: religion is both negated (Barth says ‘contradicted’) and elevated (Barth says ‘exalted’) by revelation.”<sup>126</sup>

Because the problem of religion in theology is to discern correctly where God is present in the phenomenon of human religion, Barth is concerned to provide a definitive answer for the exclusive locus of divine sublimation. Di Noia remarks that, for Barth, the sublimation of religion occurs “at the point where God’s gracious entry into the world of human religion renders the Christian religion the true religion of revelation.”<sup>127</sup> However, one must remember not to draw a symmetrical and reversible interpretive line between the God of Jesus Christ and the Christian religion because, according to Greggs,

Barth does not simply assert in this paragraph that Christianity is the true religion, but explains in what *ways* one can speak of Christianity as the true religion and, by implication, in what ways one cannot. [This is because] Christianity is a religion in response to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ who *is* the [sublimation] of religion, [meaning] the manner in which Barth can speak of Christianity as the true religion requires careful consideration.<sup>128</sup>

In order to comprehend correctly Barth’s argument for the Christian religion as the true religion one must always be cognizant of his analogical-dialectical paradigm of the “justified sinner.” Barth employs the doctrine of the *simul iustus et peccator* in his defense of the sublimation of the Christian religion because “we can speak of ‘true religion’ only in the sense in which we speak of a ‘justified sinner.’”<sup>129</sup> The *simul* comports with the Hegelian influence in Barth’s description of the *Aufhebung* of the Christian religion because, according to Green, “justification is the ‘negative

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<sup>126</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 250.

<sup>127</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 251.

<sup>128</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 28-29. Author’s emphases.

<sup>129</sup> *CD* I/2, 325.

of the negative' [and] not a simple positive. One does not leave the previous reality behind but carries it along (as negated and overcome) into the new reality."<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, Cannon argues that, for Barth, the "Justification of the Christian religion occurs when, in faith, [the sinner] surrenders himself to God, and understands the grace of God to contradict his own sinful contradiction against it. In this event of the justification of the sinner through grace lies the truth of the Christian religion [as the true religion]."<sup>131</sup> Barth's theology of the true religion is dialectical because even though all religions are abolished, the Christian religion alone is abolished in order to be sublimated. Barth is blunt, yet hopeful, when he states that, "No religion is true. It can only become true, i.e., according to that which it purports to be and for which it is upheld."<sup>132</sup> Consequently, it is argued that the doctrine of the "justified sinner" is advantageous for Barth because it provides him with the necessary analogy to discern which religion God sublimates. Barth declares that, if "we abide strictly by that analogy—and we are dealing not merely with an analogy, but in a comprehensive sense with the thing itself—we need have no hesitation in saying that the Christian religion is the true religion."<sup>133</sup>

The sublimation of the Christian religion, however, does not make it intrinsically true as it still shares solidarity with all other religions as faithlessness. Thus, within the dialectical event of the sublimation of the Christian religion into the true religion one must not succumb to the temptation to brandish Barth as a revised Neo-Protestant defender of the relative primacy of the Christian religion in contrast

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<sup>130</sup> Green, "Challenging the Religious," 481.

<sup>131</sup> Cannon, *The Concept of Religion*, 123.

<sup>132</sup> *CD I/2*, 325.

<sup>133</sup> *CD I/2*, 326.

to all other religions. According to Green, “Barth is making no claim whatsoever for the superiority of Christianity on historical, philosophical, phenomenological, comparative—or any other nontheological—grounds.”<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, Barth “is not proposing another variant of the nineteenth-century apologetic that portrays Christianity as the highest form of religion, the culmination of a historical or evolutionary process. [This is because all] such apologetics are undialectical because they fail to apply the divine judgment to Christianity.”<sup>135</sup> Rather, for Barth, the Christian religion becomes the true religion only if it is first and always declared a faithless religion with all other religions. Barth reminds us that in

our discussion of “religion as [faithlessness]” we did not consider the distinction between Christian and non-Christian religions. Our intention was that whatever we said about the other religions affected the Christian similarly. In the framework of that discussion we could not speak in any special way about Christianity. We could not give it any special or assured place in the face of that judgement. Therefore, the discussion cannot be understood as a preliminary polemic against non-Christian religions, with a view to the ultimate assertion that the Christian religion is the true religion.<sup>136</sup>

This mutual solidarity in faithlessness is ultimately for, but not a cause of, the sublimation of the Christian religion because, coupled with a valid understanding of the Christian religion relative to other religions, Barth argues that,

it is our business as Christians to apply this judgment first and most acutely to ourselves: and to others, the non-Christians, only in so far as we recognise ourselves in them, i.e., only as we see in them the truth of this judgment of revelation which concerns us, in the solidarity, therefore, in which, anticipating them in both repentance and hope, we accept this judgment to participate in the promise of revelation.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 482.

<sup>135</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 482.

<sup>136</sup> *CD* I/2, 326. This quote reveals that Barth’s theology of religion *is* his theology of religions. There is, therefore, no need to look elsewhere in the corpus of his *Church Dogmatics* for a more explicit and definitive treatment of other human religions (which obviously includes Christianity) than §17.

<sup>137</sup> *CD* I/2, 327.

Whether or not any non-Christian realizes their religious faithlessness in the light of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is not of concern here; rather, it is over the fact that the Christian religion is sublimated by God in spite of its faithlessness. The Christian religion alone knows by revelation alone how revelation and religion are to be ordered because as Barth states that, “at the beginning of a knowledge of the truth of the Christian religion, there stands the recognition that this religion, too, stands under the judgment that religion is [faithlessness], and that it is not acquitted by any inward worthiness, but only by the grace of God, proclaimed and effectual in His revelation.”<sup>138</sup> God sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion not because it claims that it is the true religion but because it is made to be so by God in Jesus Christ. As Greggs argues, “It is not *because* of its religion that Christian claims are true, but *despite* its religion, just as it is not because of sin that a human is justified, but despite her sin.”<sup>139</sup> Also Kärkkäinen is correct that, “while Barth included [the] Christian *religion* under the critique of religions in general, he still believed [the] Christian faith is the true religion—but only because of Christ; it has nothing whatsoever to do with either Christians or their [religion] per se.”<sup>140</sup>

In the light of the preceding argument Barth finds the closest parallel to Protestant Christianity in two Asian religions that originated and developed in the twelfth- and thirteenth-centuries: Yodo-Shin (Sect of the Pure Land) and Yodo-Shin-Shu (True Sect of the Pure Land). Even Barth is surprised by his findings when he states that “the most adequate and comprehensive and illuminating [‘pagan’] parallel to Christianity, [was] a religious development in the Far East, [which] is parallel not

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<sup>138</sup> CD I/2, 327.

<sup>139</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 29. Author’s emphases.

<sup>140</sup> Kärkkäinen, “Karl Barth and the Theology of Religions,” 238. Author’s emphasis.

to Roman or Greek Catholicism, but to [Protestant] Christianity, thus confronting Christianity with the question of its truth even as the logical religion of grace.”<sup>141</sup>

After surveying and delineating the historical developments and theological distinctions of these two religions, coined as “Japanese Protestantism,” Barth theologically evaluates them. He initially emphasizes the striking parallels, which he interprets as positively educative for the Christian religion because, “in its historical form, as a mode of doctrine, life and order, the Christian religion cannot be the one to which the truth belongs *per se*—not even if that form be the [Protestant form].”<sup>142</sup>

Although the doctrine of grace in the Christian religion and “Japanese Protestantism” differs in form, it is the seeming material parallel (and a potential defeat for Barth’s thesis that the Christian religion is the true religion) between these religions that Barth addresses. Even though Barth accentuates the obvious differences in these religions’ respective soteriologies, theological anthropologies, theologies proper and eschatologies<sup>143</sup> they are insufficient to render “Japanese Protestantism” as faithlessness and the Christian religion as the true religion. Barth confesses that only “one thing is really decisive for the distinction between truth and error. And we call the existence of Yodoism a providential disposition because with what is relatively the greatest possible force it makes it so clear that only one thing is decisive. That one thing is the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>144</sup> Although Barth demonstrates his scholarly acumen to compare and contrast respective religions, this is not an end in-and-for-

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<sup>141</sup> CD I/2, 340. Regarding the changing of “heathen” to “pagan” and “Reformed” to “Protestant” see: *On Religion*, 131, footnote 44. The German has “heidnisch” and “reformatisch” respectively. See KD I/2, 372.

<sup>142</sup> CD I/2, 342.

<sup>143</sup> See: CD I/2, 342, points 1-4.

<sup>144</sup> CD I/2, 343.



itself; rather, it is to demonstrate how the Christian religion is the true religion regardless of the seeming linguistic and theological continuities. As Charles Waldrop explains, “The affirmation that Christianity is the true religion is not, then, an inference based upon a comparison of Christianity with other religions. It is made as a response to the word which God speaks to us in the event of revelation.”<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, against the argument for the evolution of and inevitable merging with all religions into the Christian religion, Barth remarks that his evaluation of “Japanese Protestantism” is “not merely a matter of prudentially weighing the various possibilities of [pagan] development, which might eventually catch up with the differences we teach, but a clear insight that the truth of the Christian religion is in fact enclosed in the one name of Jesus Christ, and nothing else.”<sup>146</sup>

In the light of Barth’s arguments one must disagree with Waldrop’s assertion that because “Barth’s theology is well known for its emphasis upon grace, it might appear that Barth would praise Pure Land Buddhism and perhaps even use it as a resource when developing a Christian concept of grace.”<sup>147</sup> Although Barth finds it prudent to employ “Japanese Protestantism” in his theology of religion, it functions solely as a negative illustration and not as a constructive building block in his theology of the true religion. In that sense one could agree with another of Waldrop’s statements that, “Pure Land [Buddhism] exists because it helps Christians understand the proper basis for claiming that Christianity is the true religion. In fact, Barth used his discussion of Pure Land [Buddhism] to clarify the sense in which

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<sup>145</sup> Waldrop, “Karl Barth,” 583.

<sup>146</sup> *CD* I/2, 343.

<sup>147</sup> Waldrop, “Karl Barth,” 576.

Christianity is a religion of grace and also the true religion.”<sup>148</sup> However, one should reject Waldrop’s further suggestion that Barth’s employment of “Japanese Protestantism” is a viable resource for other theological issues. Waldrop states that, “Pure Land Buddhism suggests that Christian theologians might turn to other religions as resources when they are considering many different theological issues.”<sup>149</sup> Ultimately, Waldrop’s suggestion must be rejected because he misunderstands Barth’s criterion for evaluating all religions, including Christianity, and the means by which the Christian religion is the true religion – the name of Jesus Christ. Barth contends that,

Our knowledge, and the life and churchmanship which correspond to it so badly, genuinely distinguish us [Christians] from the [pagans] only to the extent they are at any rate symptoms of the grace and truth which is only Jesus Christ Himself and therefore the name of Jesus Christ for us—only to the extent that they are absolutely conditioned by this One and no other, and therefore tied to this name, their goal and content determined and fixed by it, strengthened and preserved by it.<sup>150</sup>

The prescription from Waldrop’s essay with which one could agree most is that

we should follow [Barth’s] lead in attempting to discern tensions and weaknesses in the theological stances of the religions we are examining. Superficial praise of other religions and a refusal to specify those aspects of their traditions that appear to us to be questionable or unwise cannot be expected to promote serious dialogue.<sup>151</sup>

However, one must still modify Waldrop’s assertion with Barth’s argument because, inasmuch as Barth was concerned to represent properly and dialogue respectfully with “Japanese Protestantism” and thereby “[keep] up with contemporary developments in the research on world religions, [so that one] can avoid continued

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<sup>148</sup> Waldrop, “Karl Barth,” 581.

<sup>149</sup> Waldrop, “Karl Barth,” 588.

<sup>150</sup> *CD* I/2, 343.

<sup>151</sup> Waldrop, “Karl Barth,” 589.

reliance on outdated conclusions,”<sup>152</sup> it is contended that he was more concerned to argue for the Christian religion as the true religion in contrast to all other religions.

For Barth, the Christian religion is

based exclusively upon faith in the one and only Jesus Christ, for it is only from Him that the relative distinctions can have and constantly derive their relative light. Therefore the true and essential distinction of the Christian religion from the non-Christian, and with it its character as the religion of truth over against the religions of error, can be demonstrated only in the fact, or event, that taught by Holy Scripture the Church listens to Jesus Christ and no one else as grace and truth, not being slack but always cheerful to proclaim and believe Him, finding its pleasure in giving itself as promised to the service offered to Him, and therefore in being His own confessor and witness in the confession and witness of the Church.<sup>153</sup>

The Christian religion is the true religion because God is gracious to it alone.

Barth contends that when “we ground the truth of the Christian religion upon grace, it is not a question of the immanent truth of a religion of grace as such, but of the reality of grace itself by which one religion is adopted and distinguished as the true one before all others.”<sup>154</sup> Barth further argues why the grace of God is not abstract or static but the historically concrete act of God in Jesus Christ as known in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This “Christological principle” guides Barth’s argument for the exclusive sublimation of the Christian religion, because if one does not submit to Jesus Christ in this matter it will be evident in their mis-ordering of revelation and religion and betray them as ensnared in the faithlessness of religion. According to Green, the “christological principle is not reversible: the Christian religion is a religion of grace because it is the religion founded on the name of Jesus

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<sup>152</sup> Waldrop, “Karl Barth,” 589.

<sup>153</sup> *CD* I/2, 344.

<sup>154</sup> *CD* I/2, 339.

Christ, but a religion of grace is not automatically [the] true religion.”<sup>155</sup> Moreover, God’s sublimation of the Christian religion is not a monochromatic event; rather, it is a unified act with multiple “aspects.” Di Noia remarks that, for Barth, “the claim that the Christian religion is the true religion is rooted in the reality of the divine action by which the church is continually created, elected, justified, and sanctified.”<sup>156</sup> However, one must remember that, inasmuch as Barth defends the divine sublimation of the Christian religion, he “never moves beyond critiquing religion because revelation contradicts religion, even the religion which pays testimony to God’s grace in revelation.”<sup>157</sup> Even though Barth could have ended §17.3 without discussing the four “aspects” he decides, as Green argues, to discuss these “respective standpoints of four classic topics of Christian doctrine [... and in] each case Barth draws the theological implications and appends an excursus devoted to a specific point related to the doctrinal topic under discussion.”<sup>158</sup>

The first “aspect” of the sublimation of the Christian religion into the true religion is the act of divine creation. It is here that scholarship regarding Barth’s theology of the true religion has unfortunately been found seriously wanting for, according to Greggs, not only has Barth’s doctrine of creation in general “remained one of the most understudied aspects of Barth’s theology”<sup>159</sup> but also, the relationship between the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation and Barth’s mature doctrine of creation has been grossly neglected. Barth begins by

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<sup>155</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 482.

<sup>156</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 482.

<sup>157</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 31.

<sup>158</sup> *On Religion*, 22.

<sup>159</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 81.

stating that the Christian religion's "existence in historical form and individual determinations is not an autonomous or self-grounded existence. The name of Jesus Christ alone has created the Christian religion."<sup>160</sup> The Christian religion, like creation, has no independent existence apart from Jesus Christ, which means for Barth that, "apart from the act of creation by the name of Jesus Christ, which like creation generally is a *creatio continua*, and therefore apart from the Creator, it has no reality."<sup>161</sup> It is here that Barth draws upon the anhypostasis of the humanity of Jesus Christ to substantiate the sublimation of the Christian religion because just as Jesus of Nazareth has no independent existence apart from union with the eternal Son of God so the Christian religion cannot be the true religion apart from union with Jesus Christ. For Barth the "Christian religion is simply the earthly-historical life of the Church and the children of God. As such we must think of it as an annexe to the human nature of Jesus Christ."<sup>162</sup> Thus, for Barth, in order to become and be the true religion all Christians must "live in [Jesus Christ], or they do not live at all. By living in Him they have a part in the eternal truth of His own life. But they have the choice only of a part in His life or of no life at all."<sup>163</sup> Therefore, through participation in the humanity of Jesus Christ the Christian religion is created into the true religion meaning that, according to Green, the "christological concreteness of Barth's thought thus extends not only to religious ideas and teachings but also to the social embodiment of [the Christian] religion in human history and culture."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> CD I/2, 346.

<sup>161</sup> CD I/2, 346. Cannon points out that, "Barth does not mean creation in the historical sense, but in the actual sense, adding that it is a creatio continua." *The Concept of Religion*, 125.

<sup>162</sup> CD I/2, 348.

<sup>163</sup> CD I/2, 348.

The second “aspect” of the sublimation of the Christian religion into the true religion is the act of divine election. According to Greggs, in the event of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, the Christian becomes cognizant of and confesses that

Jesus Christ is God’s eternal Yes to creation as something other than Himself, and in realizing that this Yes is the beginning of all of God’s works and ways, a theology which takes the critique [and redemption] of religion seriously will affirm the world in its worldliness as the creation of God, the blueprint of which finds itself in God’s eternal self-election in Jesus Christ.<sup>165</sup>

As the “blueprint” of creation election relates to, but must not be confused with, creation because, as Barth states, “there is a *creatio continua* so also there is an *electio continua*, better described, of course, as God’s faithfulness and patience.”<sup>166</sup> Because God is faithful and patient with the Christian religion one can see, by faith, that it is the true religion and, as argued by Di Noia, its relationship “to the name of Jesus Christ is one which the Christian religion did not choose for itself, but which is the result of *divine election*, in which the faithfulness and patience of God are enacted.”<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, because the Christian religion is elected to be the true religion this does not negate or exalt but establishes the individual choices of Christians to testify that they, individually and collectively as the church, have been chosen by God in Jesus Christ. Barth argues that

there is no doubt that an election does take place: but it is an election upon which, just because it is our own election, we can only look back as upon something which has taken place already. In the act of electing we are not confronted by two or three possibilities between which we can choose. We choose the only possibility which is given to us [...] Those who confess and therefore choose the name of Jesus Christ choose the only possibility which is given to them, the

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<sup>164</sup> *On Religion*, 22.

<sup>165</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 92.

<sup>166</sup> *CD I/2*, 349.

<sup>167</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 251. Author’s emphasis.

possibility which is given to them by Jesus Christ [...] They elect, but they elect their own election.<sup>168</sup>

The third “aspect” of the sublimation of the Christian religion into the true religion is the act of divine justification. Barth believes religion is the human’s attempt at self-justification, which is why he sees divine justification as the forgiveness of sins and reminds his readers that “the Christian religion as such has no worthiness of its own, to equip it specially to be the true religion. [Therefore] we must now aver even more clearly that in itself and as such it is absolutely unworthy to be the true religion.”<sup>169</sup> For Barth, the justification of the Christian religion is not based upon “a whim or caprice which is this confronting and decisive fact but the righteousness and the judgment of God.”<sup>170</sup> Additionally, if the Christian religion were to attempt to modify its justification by pointing to its creation and election by God alone, this would deny its existence as a religion even though God creates and elects it; rather, for Barth, the Christian religion “rests entirely on the righteousness of God. It is not in any way conditioned by the [inherent] qualities of the Christian religion. It cannot, therefore, be understood in any way except as an act of forgiveness of sin.”<sup>171</sup> Ultimately, Barth perceives the justification of the Christian religion as revealed not in its religious deeds or in any nominalist “legal fiction” of imputed righteousness but in

the unification of the eternal divine Word with the nature of man, and therefore with the rectification of that human nature, notwithstanding and in spite of its natural perversion, to humility and obedience to God. This rectification of human

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<sup>168</sup> *CD I/2*, 351-352.

<sup>169</sup> *CD I/2*, 352.

<sup>170</sup> *CD I/2*, 354.

<sup>171</sup> *CD I/2*, 354.

nature is the work of Jesus Christ from birth to death, and it is revealed to be such in His resurrection from the dead.<sup>172</sup>

For Barth, the divine justification of the Christian religion does not first and foremost concern the Christian religion because, “It is not that some men are vindicated as opposed to others, or one part of humanity as opposed to other parts of the same humanity. It is that God Himself is vindicated as opposed to and on behalf of all men and all humanity.”<sup>173</sup>

The fourth “aspect” of the sublimation of the Christian religion into the true religion is the act of divine sanctification. United with and dependent upon justification, sanctification is the event in which the Christian religion hears how God is vindicated and then vindicates it in the act of justification, including how it is sanctified to proclaim God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Barth argues that,

In the light of its justification and creation and election by the name of Jesus Christ, the fact that it is the Christian religion and not another [means it] cannot possibly be neutral or indifferent or without significance. On the contrary, even though Christianity is a religion like others, it is significant and eloquent, a sign, a proclamation.<sup>174</sup>

Moreover, the sanctification of the Christian religion is not a datum to be possessed and domesticated but God’s continual giving whereby he sanctifies the Christian religion so that it will proclaim his sanctification of it. Barth points to God’s self-revelation in Word and Spirit when he states that, “The Christian religion is the sacramental area created by the Holy Spirit, in which the God whose Word became flesh continues to speak through the sign of His revelation.”<sup>175</sup> Even though the

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<sup>172</sup> CD I/2, 355.

<sup>173</sup> CD I/2, 356-357.

<sup>174</sup> CD I/2, 358.

<sup>175</sup> CD I/2, 359.



Christian religion is no less than a socio-religious entity it is most importantly a creature of the Word in the outpouring of the Spirit, which means, for Barth, that it “is an actuality which is called and dedicated to the declaration of the name of Jesus Christ. And that is the sanctification of the Christian religion.”<sup>176</sup> However, if the Christian religion were to boast of its alien holiness and purity of proclamation, Barth states that, “It is perfectly true that Christians are sinners and that the Church is a Church of sinners. But if they are justified sinners—as Christians are—then in virtue of the same Word and Spirit which justifies them, they are also sanctified sinners.”<sup>177</sup>

### **CLARIFICATIONS AND CORRECTIONS**

Although much attention has been given to §17.1 and §17.2, it is §17.3, particularly the four “aspects” of the sublimation of the Christian religion, which has been virtually untouched by scholars.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, not only is it imperative to understand Barth’s theology of religion in its fullness but also to appreciate and better apprehend how he understands these four “aspects” in §17.3 as surprisingly similar to their respective formulations in the later volumes of his *Church Dogmatics*. Di Noia summarizes that,

Without denying the reality of religion as an element in human experience and in human society and culture, Barth is concerned to advance a properly and consistently theological account of human religiosity which allows full scope to the doctrine of the gracious action of the triune God who draws human persons into the communion of trinitarian life through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> CD I/2, 359.

<sup>177</sup> CD I/2, 360.

<sup>178</sup> Greggs’ *Theology Against Religion* (pp. 74-86) discusses creation and election but not justification and sanctification.

<sup>179</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 252.

With this theological survey on Barth's theology of religion having finished it is vital to understand why one must continue to demonstrate how the preceding theological arguments in general, and the four "aspects" in particular, are broadly consonant (despite not insignificant dissimilarities) with the later formulations of Barth's theologies of creation, election, justification, and sanctification. However, before proceeding to interact with the further indirect yet complementary evidence of how God sublimates the Christian religion, two common misconceptions of Barth's theology of religion must be refuted.

First is Di Noia's surprising, but not shocking, conclusion when he argues that, "Barth's account of the place of religion in theology has important affinities with classical and Medieval understandings of the nature of theology, including, notably, that advanced by Thomas Aquinas and by many Thomists."<sup>180</sup> The affinities Di Noia believes he sees are supposedly found in the "overall logic of Barth's argument that the grace of revelation sublates – or takes up into itself – the natural components of human existence ('religious' or otherwise) [as] remarkably and unmistakably congruent with Thomistic (and generally Catholic) approaches to Christology, the theology of grace, and theological methodology."<sup>181</sup> It is here that Di Noia betrays his Roman Catholic sentiments in his attempt to conflate Barth's theology of religion with Aquinas'. Contra Di Noia's claim, Barth's employment of *Aufhebung* does not merely mean a perfecting of nature, as in Thomist soteriology, but the Christian religion's thorough abolition with the goal to its purification. Di Noia also curiously scuttles his argument when he claims that "Aquinas and his followers in Catholic theology would provide an account of human religiosity that is

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<sup>180</sup> Di Noia, "Religion," 248-249.

<sup>181</sup> Di Noia, "Religion," 249.

both more positive and less dialectically edged than the one advanced by Barth here.”<sup>182</sup> The reason, however, why Barth’s theology of religion cannot be interpreted as a revision of Aquinas’ is precisely because Barth is an “edgy” dialectical theologian who argues for an ultimately positive, because first wholly negative, understanding of the Christian religion as abolished and then purified by God.<sup>183</sup> Because Di Noia posits an anemic hamartiology he only needs a corresponding soteriology of renovation and not of resurrection as presupposed in Barth’s use of *Aufhebung*. Thus, Di Noia should have affirmed with Green how Barth’s *Aufhebung* entails that “(1) Christians, on the basis of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, must say a resounding no to human religion; and (2) that on the same basis they may also say a qualified yes to [the Christian] religion.”<sup>184</sup>

The second misconception concerning Barth’s theology of religion is his supposed chauvinism and bigotry regarding his argument for the Christian religion as the true religion, meaning all other religions are false. Waldrop opines that although

Barth may help us guard against the temptation to boast about the relative merits of Christianity over other religions, it is, nevertheless, difficult to see how his claim that Christianity is the only true religion avoids a type of boasting that is potentially just as dangerous [...] Barth seems to prompt us to boast that Christianity is superior to all religions because God has chosen it and rejected all others.<sup>185</sup>

In response to Waldrop’s argument one could stand in qualified agreement with his concern over the possible misconstruing and misappropriating of Barth’s argument for the sole sublimation of the Christian religion; however, this would ultimately be a

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<sup>182</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 249.

<sup>183</sup> The definitive work in which Barth is understood as a consistently dialectical theologian after his “break” with liberal Protestantism is: Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>184</sup> Green, “Challenging the Religious,” 477.

<sup>185</sup> Waldrop, “Karl Barth,” 593.

fundamental misrepresentation of Barth's dialectical argument for the Christian religion as sublimated and yet still condemned as faithlessness with all other religions as seen in his use of the analogy of the *simul iustus et peccator*. For Barth, Christians are

what they are, and their [Christian] religion is the true religion, not because they recognize [Jesus Christ] as such and act accordingly, not in virtue of their religion of grace, but in virtue of the fact that God has graciously intervened for them, in virtue of His mercy in spite of their apparent but equivocal religion of grace, in virtue of the good pleasure which He has in them, in virtue of His free election, of which this good pleasure is the only motive, in virtue of the Holy Spirit whom He willed to pour out upon them.<sup>186</sup>

The common mistake in both misconceptions of Barth's theology of religion is one that Di Noia and Waldrop conveniently forget, i.e., Barth is a dialectical theologian, which means they must accept the fact that God speaks a definitive "No" to all religions and then, in his sovereign free grace, pours out his Holy Spirit, as revealed in Jesus Christ, solely upon the Christian religion thereby speaking a final, definitive "Yes." Even Di Noia remarks that the "Christian religion is a religion like other religions; what makes it uniquely true is not that it is a religion, but that it is a religion that has been taken up by divine grace."<sup>187</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

When understood correctly, Barth's theology of religion is unique and original not only because he breaks the stereotype expected by his detractors and interlocutors,<sup>188</sup> but because he re-affirms (albeit in a highly revised way) the traditional understanding of religion in general and the Christian religion in particular from a

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<sup>186</sup> CD I/2, 345.

<sup>187</sup> Di Noia, "Religion," 251.

<sup>188</sup> These erroneous conclusions were stated above and are: chauvinism, bigotry, utter disdain for all other potentially valid expressions of religion and a Neo-Protestant in (neo-)orthodox garb.

thoroughly theological, i.e., Christological, perspective. By situating his theology of religion within his theology of revelation Barth reverses and corrects centuries of poorly constructed theologies of religion. According to Di Noia, “In this reversal of revelation and religion that Barth laments and, in paragraph 17, endeavours to correct [... he advances] a methodological one that bears on all theological inquiries.”<sup>189</sup>

Therefore, it is contended that an opportunity and responsibility has arisen to expound how hitherto unseen explanatory relationships and (dis)continuities exist between Barth’s theology of religion, particularly the Christian religion as the true religion with its four “aspects,” and their relation to their corresponding doctrines in the later volumes of his *Church Dogmatics*. Because of the conviction that the four “aspects” at the conclusion of §17.3 are the apex of Barth’s theology of the true religion, this will be the starting point from which to trace out constructive lines of interpretation and understanding for how Barth’s theology of the true religion relates to and is illuminated by the aforementioned doctrines. The next chapter will look to Barth’s mature doctrine of creation in *Church Dogmatics* III/1, §42 and argue how his employment of the doctrine of the anhypostasis in §17.3 corresponds to and is complemented by his later doctrine of creation, particularly creation as justification, thereby indirectly substantiating his prior argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as an act of divine creation.

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<sup>189</sup> Di Noia, “Religion,” 248. The assumed “inquiries” are: creation, election, justification and sanctification.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE REDEMPTION OF RELIGION AS CREATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter it will be argued that Barth's argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation has a particular theological continuity with his mature doctrine of creation in *Church Dogmatics* III/1, §42 ("The Yes of God the Creator"). The chapter begins by elucidating the first "aspect" in §17.3, which is the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation, and contends that the doctrine of the anhypostasis is a key element in Barth's argument because, for him, the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth has no existence apart from union with the Son of God, which is analogous to the utter contingency and dependence of the Christian religion upon God who creates it into the true religion. In the light of the arguments made by Barth in §17.3 concerning the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation the chapter will then discuss first §42.1 wherein Barth argues for creation as benefit and then second in §42.2 for creation as actualisation, both of which finally culminate in §42.3 with creation as justification. At various points it will be contended that the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation in §17.3 has a significant theological continuity with Barth's doctrine of creation as justification in §42.3. The exegesis of §42.3 will demonstrate how Barth's argument for creation as justification aids the reader to understand better how the Christian religion is sublimated by an act of divine creation despite certain discontinuities between §17.3 and §42.3, particularly their relation to election. It is Barth's doctrine of creation as justification that allows one to understand more clearly how his doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation proves that the Christian religion is the true religion in exclusion to all other religions.

## **THE SUBLIMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AS CREATION**

The Christian religion cannot create itself into the true religion; rather, it can only exist as the true religion by a creative act of God, thus one must turn to §17.3 in order to discuss the first “aspect” by which God sublimates the Christian religion.

Here Barth argues that no thing and no one can create the Christian religion into the true religion because, for him, it can only be so by “an act of divine creation.”<sup>190</sup>

Because the Christian religion is a religion, as evidenced in its constant faithlessness, it cannot point to its creation as the true religion in abstraction from the God who continually (re)creates it. Barth argues for the Christian religion’s continual need for sublimation as divine creation as analogous to the initial act of all creation when he states that,

if we want to speak of the Christian religion to begin with simply as a reality, then we cannot be content to look back on the fact of its creation and thus its presence, but we must rather understand it, as we do our own existence and that of the world, as a reality that is to be created and was created, not only today but also yesterday and tomorrow, through the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>191</sup>

Divine creation, as a once-for-all and continual act, lies at the heart of Barth’s doctrine of the true religion because, for him, the Christian religion cannot become and remain the true religion apart from its continual creation (*creatio continua*) by the name of Jesus Christ. By way of contrast, however, Barth believes God creates the Christian religion into the true religion *ex contrario* to its faithlessness, whereas God creates creation *ex nihilo* and in absolute distinction from “the Nothingness.” Furthermore, the Christian religion as the true religion still perpetuates faithlessness thereby needing continual re-creation whereas creation is completed but still requires preservation from “the Nothingness.”

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<sup>190</sup> CD I/2, 346.

<sup>191</sup> *On Religion*, 109.

Barth then counters two rebuttals that call the exclusivity of the divine creation of the Christian religion into question. The first rebuttal asserts that the Christian religion, along with all other religions, possesses the possibility to make itself the true religion. Barth initially and partially concedes, though ultimately rejects, that this ubiquitous possibility is “open to the so-called Christian as well as to other men [... But] as a possibility which is general by nature, it can be clearly realised only in a known or unknown non-Christian religion. In any case it is only an empty possibility, and therefore not a reality.”<sup>192</sup> If the Christian religion, as the divinely created true religion, were a human possibility it would, for Barth, inevitably degenerate along with all other religions due to the fact socio-historical forces eventually undermine and mould all religions they interact with into their own image. Thus, according to Barth, the Christian religion “would then have existed [as] a fairly quiet religious Hellenism of Jewish Oriental and Occidental provenance and colouring.”<sup>193</sup> However, for Barth, true

Christianity as a missionary and cultic and theological and political and moral force has existed from the outset only in an indissoluble relationship with the name of Jesus Christ. And from the history of the Church during the last centuries we can learn that the existence of the Christian religion is actually bound up with this name and with the act of divine creation and preservation to which it points.<sup>194</sup>

The second rebuttal concerns the decline and decay of European Christendom which Barth seemingly equates with the rise of Neo-Protestantism as evidenced in its unfortunate exchange of the revelation of religion for the religion of revelation. Barth argues that,

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<sup>192</sup> CD I/2, 346.

<sup>193</sup> CD I/2, 347. One must also remember that religion is *Unglaube*.

<sup>194</sup> CD I/2, 347.



the ruins, in the process of rapid and complete disintegration, of a quasi-religious structure that was once called Christianity and maybe even was, but that now, with its vital root severed, does not even have the viability of a non-Christian religion, but can only disappear and be replaced by some other religion that is at least capable of existence.<sup>195</sup>

Just as creation would be consumed by “the Nothingness” if God were to cease preserving it, similarly, the Christian religion would remain faithless apart from its continual creation by the name of Jesus Christ. Moreover, just as creation is intrinsically impotent to repel the onslaught of “the Nothingness,” so too is the Christian religion ineffectual in countering those who attempt to commandeer and destroy it. According to Barth, if the Christian religion looks “away from the name of Jesus Christ even momentarily, [it] loses the substance in virtue of which it can assert itself in and against the state and society as an entity of a special order.”<sup>196</sup>

Having completed his main argument that only by the name of Jesus Christ can the Christian religion be created into the true religion, Barth composes an excursus wherein he argues that in his employment of the “name” of Jesus Christ he does not argue in a nominalist mode nor does he think that simply utilizing the name “Jesus Christ” magically validates his doctrine of the Christian religion as created into the true religion. Also, just as the Christian doctrine of creation describes why there is something and not nothing, Barth’s doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation explains that by the name of Jesus Christ is it sublimated and not only faithlessness like all other religions. Barth believes

The name of Jesus Christ is certainly no mere *nomen* in the sense of the famous medieval controversy. It is the very essence and source of all reality. It stands in free creative power at the beginning of the Christian religion and its vital utterances. If not, then what we bring in at the end or climax is not in any sense

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<sup>195</sup> *On Religion*, 109.

<sup>196</sup> *CD I/2*, 347. One is reminded of the Confessing Church’s struggle against the German Christians.

the name of Jesus Christ. It is simply a hollow sound which cannot transform our human nothingness into divine fulness.<sup>197</sup>

Barth then points to a particular aspect of Jesus Christ he believes has the most continuity with the divine creation of the Christian religion – the anhypostasis of Jesus Christ. According to Bruce McCormack, Barth adopted and employed the anhypostasis because he “saw in it an understanding of the incarnate being of the Mediator which preserved that infinite qualitative distinction between God and humankind which had been at the forefront of his concerns throughout the previous [*Römerbrief*] phase.”<sup>198</sup> Therefore, it is contend that the Christian religion exists anhypostatically to the name of Jesus Christ because the Christian religion is, according to Paul Dafydd Jones, like “Jesus’s humanity [which] lacks subsistence and reality in itself, independent from its creation and assumption by God qua Son.”<sup>199</sup> With such stress on the anhypostasis, however, one could conclude that, for Barth, Jesus Christ and the Christian religion exist in their respective relationships with God from an intrinsic necessity; and yet, that conclusion is untenable because Barth employs the anhypostasis to emphasize the impossibility of any religion being innately worthy to be sublimated by God. As Mangina remarks,

Moderns have often resisted the *anhypostasis*, seeing it as a denial that Jesus was a real person with [a] will, consciousness, and passions of his own. Barth insists that this is not the point. Of course we must acknowledge that Jesus was ‘a man’, a particular human identity among others. Only so could he suffer and die for us. What is at stake, rather, is whether we see the salvation enacted in him as God’s radical gift, or as a possibility that lies immanent in human nature.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> CD I/2, 348.

<sup>198</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth’s*, 327. Barth also adopted and employed the *anhypostasis*.

<sup>199</sup> Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 23.

<sup>200</sup> Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 41.

Using John 1:14 as paradigmatic for the irreversible order and movement of how the Word of God became flesh and how the anhypostasis and enhypostasis of Jesus of Nazareth relate, Barth believes

There never was a man Jesus as such apart from the eternal reality of the Son of God. Certainly in the fullness of human possibilities, along the line from Abraham to the Virgin Mary, there was the possibility which found its realisation in the man Jesus. But it did not find this realisation independently, but in virtue of the creative act in which the eternal Son of God assumed the human possibility into His reality, giving to it in that reality the reality which previously and *per se* it did not possess, and which, when it acquires it, it does not possess apart from His reality. The human nature of Jesus Christ has no hypostasis [i.e., anhypostasis] of its own, we are told. It has it only in [i.e., enhypostasis] the Logos.<sup>201</sup>

In traditional, orthodox Christology the anhypostasis negates all arguments that Jesus of Nazareth could have come into being, or exist at any time, independent from his hypostatic union with the Son of God and thereby (un)wittingly affirm adoptionism.

According to McCormack, the

net effect of this teaching is the rejection of every form of adoptionism. It is not as though the Logos chose to inhabit at some point an already existing human being. Rather, a human nature which had not previously existed was created especially for this Subject (the Logos) to be his own. Thus, there was not a moment when this human nature did not have its being and existence grounded in the Person of the Logos.<sup>202</sup>

For Barth, this tenet of Christian orthodoxy parallels the act of the divine creation of the Christian religion by the name of Jesus Christ because the Christian religion never exists as the true religion apart from its continual creation in the event of sublimation; hence, the Christian religion never possesses the intrinsic possibility of being “adopted” by God to become and be the true religion. Barth summarizes the anhypostatic creation of the Christian religion when he declares that,

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<sup>201</sup> CD I/2, 348.

<sup>202</sup> McCormack, *Karl Barth's*, 362.

the life of the earthly body of Christ and His members, who are called out of the schematic, bare possibility into the reality by the fact that He, the Head, has taken and gathered them to Himself as the earthly form of his heavenly body. Loosed from Him they could only fall back into the schematic possibility, i.e., into the non-being from which they proceeded. They live in Him, or they do not live at all. By living in Him they have a part in the eternal truth of His own life. But they have the choice only of a part in His life or of no life at all. But a part in the life of the Son of God, as the heavenly Head of this earthly body, is simply the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>203</sup>

In the next section it will be argued that Barth's doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation has a certain continuity with his mature theology of creation, especially creation as justification, because both are determined by the doctrine of the anhypostasis of Jesus Christ.

### **THE AFFIRMATION OF CREATION AND THE CREATION OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**

In *Church Dogmatics* III/1, §42 Barth argues for the affirmation of creation as benefit, actualisation, and justification. Robert Sherman remarks that although Barth “would likely resist calling it such, this section [i.e., §42] is essentially an apologetic theology. Having expounded the meaning and purpose of creation on the basis of the divine revelation given through Scripture, Barth will now describe the distinctive nature of creation ‘in itself and as such.’”<sup>204</sup> However, Barth's apologetic tone does not mean he constructs a natural theology of creation for, as William Stacy Johnson states, Barth's doctrine of creation is “but one part of the ongoing, beneficent act by which God effectuates God's eternal choice to be graciously ‘for’ and ‘with’ human beings in the unfolding history of creation, reconciliation, and redemption.”<sup>205</sup> Barth opposes all natural theologies of creation because they believe the relationship

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<sup>203</sup> CD I/2, 348.

<sup>204</sup> Robert Sherman, *The Shift to Modernity* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 82.

<sup>205</sup> Johnson, *The Mystery of God*, 74.

between God and creation can be understood from empirical observations and/or logical inferences alone apart from divine revelation. Oliver Crisp summarizes Barth's methodology relative to his doctrine of creation by stating that,

According to Barth we may not presume to know what God is like from our own ratiocination, or on the basis of some putative natural revelation in the created order. We can only know what God is like where God breaks into our world in an event of revelation, and makes himself known to us. Applied to his doctrine of creation, this means that human beings are incapable of knowing that this world is a creation as such (rather than, say, a cosmic accident, or a random occurrence, or a brute fact without any explanation), outside of revelation.<sup>206</sup>

For Barth, the natural theologian divests God of his deity when she attempts to transform him into a principle to justify her doctrine of creation as constructed in abstraction from, rather than in sole reliance on, the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Barth declares that, "It is for this very reason that the Creator cannot be changed into world-cause, a supreme or first cause or a principle of being. All such concepts denote a timeless relationship, i.e., one which exists always and everywhere, analogous to the internal cosmic relationships of cause and effect."<sup>207</sup>

In order to construct a proper Christian doctrine of creation Barth believes one must only look to and hear from Jesus Christ. Furthermore, because Barth has a doctrine of creation in §17.3 and §42 respectively it is not surprising to see points of continuity (e.g., anhypostasis) and discontinuity (e.g., election) in the development of his theology between the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation and the divine affirmation of creation. However, even though there are theological discontinuities between §17.3 and §42, this development in Barth's theology does

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<sup>206</sup> Oliver Crisp, "Karl Barth on Creation," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 86.

<sup>207</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 13. Hereafter *CD* III/1.

not invalidate his use of the doctrine of creation in the sublimation of the Christian religion but ultimately strengthens it in spite of the discontinuities.

The exegesis of Barth's doctrine of the affirmation of creation begins by discussing §42.1 ("Creation as Benefit"). Drawing upon the previous section (§41, "Creation and Covenant"), particularly the relationship between the temporal creation and the eternal covenant upon which it is founded, Barth reminds his readers of how creation's "meaning and purpose as the first of all the divine works and the beginning of all things distinct from God, are to be seen in the covenant of God with man fulfilled in Jesus Christ."<sup>208</sup> The phraseology Barth utilizes to delineate the relationship between God's eternal act of election and his temporal act of creation is a unique aspect of his doctrine of creation, i.e., the act of God's creation is the "external basis of the covenant" and the eternal covenant between God the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit is election, which is the "internal basis of creation."<sup>209</sup> According to Kathryn Tanner, the "internal basis of creation and providence is the covenant fulfilled in Christ, or more fundamentally, that internal basis is the election of Jesus Christ as the be-all and end-all of God's ways and acts *ad extra*."<sup>210</sup> For Barth, creation and election are united, yet not conflated or confused, as creation testifies that God has elected to create and election proclaims that God has purposively created. Crisp states that, "On the one hand, creation is the means by which God ordains to bring about his covenant relationship with humankind through the agency of Christ [...]. But on the other hand, or looked at

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<sup>208</sup> *CD* III/1, 330.

<sup>209</sup> See: *CD* III/1, 94-228 and 228-329 respectively.

<sup>210</sup> Kathryn Tanner, "Creation and providence," in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118.

from another point of view, the covenant is the internal meaning or basis of the creation. It is the reason why God creates the world.”<sup>211</sup> Consequently, Barth immediately distinguishes between creation as a benefit which God affirms and that which is not creation and is subsequently rejected by him. Barth states that,

Only the creation of God is really outside God. And only that which really exists outside God is the creation of God. But the creation of God and therefore what really exists apart from God is as necessarily and completely the object of the divine good-pleasure, and therefore the divine benefit, as that which has not been created by God and is not therefore real must be the object of divine wrath and judgment.<sup>212</sup>

Unless one understands God’s creation as benefit and that which he has not created as rejected, then one will never have a true understanding of creation as benefit.

Barth states that, “The Christian apprehension of creation requires and involves the principle that creation is benefit. It shows us God’s good-pleasure as the root, the foundation and the end of divine creation. It suggests the peace with which God separated and protected what He truly willed from what He did not will, and therefore from the unreal.”<sup>213</sup> The sole criterion by which the Christian can and must discern between what God created and rejected is Jesus Christ in whom God eternally covenanted with creation and eternally rejected that which is not creation. Because Jesus Christ is the sole criterion for a Christian theology of creation, it is concluded that, for Barth, God affirms creation as testified to solely in the self-revelation of Jesus Christ. According to Gorringer,

Only from this standpoint can we truly affirm that creation is grace but from this standpoint this is what we have to do. Creation as we know it in Christ is not Yes and No but Yes—Yes to Godself, and Yes to that which is willed and created by God. Creation is good because it is the product of the divine joy, honour, and

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<sup>211</sup> Crisp, “Barth on Creation,” 84.

<sup>212</sup> *CD* III/1, 331.

<sup>213</sup> *CD* III/1, 331.

affirmation. It is the goodness of God which takes shape in it, and God's good pleasure is both the foundation and end of creation, and is therefore its ontological ground.<sup>214</sup>

Moreover, creation is not a neutral reality situated between good and evil, nor a metaphysical dualism locked in an eternal war of light and darkness; rather, according to Gorringe, "it corresponds with the God who is good. Creation is good because God actualizes it and justifies it. Its rightness, goodness, worth, and perfection spring from its correspondence to the work of God's own Son as resolved from eternity and fulfilled in time."<sup>215</sup> Barth believes the primordial decision of God to create is situated within his pre-temporal eternity, thereby avoiding all possibility of arbitrariness, as there never was a time when God did not choose to create, even though there was a time when creation did not yet exist. Tanner contends that,

According to Barth's doctrine of election, God from all eternity is that one who determines to be for us in Christ; this is the fundamental act of divine Self-determination that establishes who God is and how God acts in all God's relations with a world outside God. There is only one God – the God of Jesus Christ – and God is *that* God in all God's dealings with creatures. If God is only God as God is for us in Christ, creatures are also only what they are insofar as they belong to Christ.<sup>216</sup>

Creation is not a haphazard act of God as he planned and decreed its existence from all eternity, which is why Barth also argues for God's continuing interaction with creation as not simply to govern over but also to confront and justify it because it has been and is continually assailed by "the Nothingness." Barth sees this as revealed in Jesus Christ, because

Then and only then does our creaturely existence as such already stand in connexion with the organising centre of all God's acts, with the reality of Jesus Christ; then and only then can we understand our existence and nature as God's

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<sup>214</sup> Gorringe, *Karl Barth*, 172.

<sup>215</sup> Gorringe, *Karl Barth*, 173.

<sup>216</sup> Tanner, "Creation," 114. Author's emphasis.



grace; then and only then can we believe in our existence and nature as we believe in Jesus Christ, as we believe in the triune God.<sup>217</sup>

Consequently, one cannot know God as creator apart from knowing him as the redeemer of creation, even the (supposedly) irredeemable. Tanner contends that Barth's construction of his doctrine "of creation and providence in the light of Christ is a way of pointing out the world-significance of Jesus: Christ's coming changes the situation of the whole world; nothing is the same. Everything that Jesus touches is altered, moreover."<sup>218</sup> Against any and all attempts to construe God's creation and the redemption of it in a selective manner whereby certain aspects of creation are deemed irredeemable one must only look to Jesus Christ for, according to Tanner,

Christ's coming cannot be viewed as an event with partial effects – effects, say, on the spiritual and individual aspects of human existence solely, to the exclusion of material and social existence. [Also] the doctrine of creation and providence give theological support for confidence and trust in Jesus' victory over the forces in the world that resist it.<sup>219</sup>

For Barth, the clearest witness to the redemption of creation is seen in the particular history of Jesus Christ because in him God reveals himself as the creator and redeemer of creation. Once again Tanner states that, for Barth,

The Son of God's assumption of human flesh is not something alien to the world, something about which the world might therefore remain indifferent. No, the world to which the Son of God comes is the Son's own world. That is what the [doctrine] of creation for the sake of Christ and the claim that Christ is himself the one in and through whom the world is created are designed to make clear – there is no neutral place to stand with respect to the event of Jesus Christ.<sup>220</sup>

Therefore, because Barth constructs his doctrine of creation solely upon Jesus Christ he must argue how creation is a benefit despite the invasion of "the Nothingness."

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<sup>217</sup> *CD* III/1, 61.

<sup>218</sup> Tanner, "Creation," 112. One thinks especially of religion, particularly in light of §17.2.

<sup>219</sup> Tanner, "Creation," 113.

<sup>220</sup> Tanner, "Creation," 112.

Since God eternally chooses to be with and for his creation in the election of Jesus Christ, he pre-emptively decided before his act of creation to reject that which he did not elect.<sup>221</sup> Although Barth sees this in the mytho-poetic language of Genesis 1:2 it is most clearly revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ where God rejects that which tries to destroy creation. According to Tanner, “the unmerited acceptance of human beings and the rejection of chaos, sin, and death on the cross of Christ – the Yes and No of God’s act in Christ – are mirrored by God’s acceptance of only some things for creation and the rejection of others. Creation, then, displays the character of justification as unmerited acceptance.”<sup>222</sup> Hence, for Barth, “the statement that creation is divine benefit is rooted solely and exclusively in the connexion between creation and covenant, and therefore in the recognition that God is the Creator in Jesus Christ. Only from this standpoint can it be decisively affirmed that creation is benefit, and to what extent this is the case”<sup>223</sup>

In §42.2 (“Creation as Actualisation”) Barth continues his argument for the affirmation of creation by contending for creation’s actualisation. Barth argues that, “God’s creation is affirmed by Him because it is real, and it is real because it is affirmed by Him. Creation is actualisation. Hence the creature is reality. No creature is rooted in itself, or maintained by itself, but each is willed, posited, secured and preserved by God, and therefore each in its place and manner is genuine reality.”<sup>224</sup> In this subsection, Barth argues that creation is known solely by the self-

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<sup>221</sup> For Barth’s doctrine of “the Nothingness” (i.e., *das Nichtige*) see: *CD* III/1, 101-110 and *Church Dogmatics* III/3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 289-368. Hereafter *CD* III/3.

<sup>222</sup> Tanner, “Creation,” 119. For Barth’s commentary on Gen. 1:2 see: *CD* III/1, 101-110.

<sup>223</sup> *CD* III/1, 342.

<sup>224</sup> *CD* III/1, 345. Here also is an allusion to the anhypostasis of creation.

revelation of God when he remarks that, “Creaturely existence is the benefit of creation. And therefore recognition of creaturely existence means recognition of the benefit of creation on the ground of the self-revelation of the Creator.”<sup>225</sup> Inasmuch as humans variously attempt to justify their particular individual existence and creation as a whole apart from divine revelation, Barth believes the true knowledge of creation as benefit is based solely upon God’s revelatory encounter with the human. Barth states that, “We have to be told by our Creator that we and all that exists outside us are His creatures. Then in assured recognition we can and must and may and will also say that we are, that something is. This has to be said to us.”<sup>226</sup> Rather than point to the human’s consciousness of her existence, the world’s existence, and God’s existence, and the (supposed) proofs thereof, Barth points to the God of Jesus Christ who reveals that creation exists and that he created it. Regarding the relationship (or the lack thereof) between the human’s consciousness of God and self, and the self-revelation of God Barth states that

The fact that we are told by our Creator that we and what is outside us are His creatures is not, therefore, interchangeable with the immediate consciousness of God, however things may stand with the latter. Our reference is to the divine self-disclosure which corresponds to the reality of the Creator. Hence we are not concerned about an extension of our consciousness, but about a vital confrontation of our consciousness, and about the new insights to which this alone gives rise and which we can acquire only as we acknowledge this confrontation. Just as the reality of the Creator differs from all other reality in that it alone is self-existent and therefore original, so its self-disclosure differs from that of all other beings and every creaturely mind in that it and it alone is able to reveal its existence with authenticity, truth and effectiveness, and in this revelation to affirm the reality of its being.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> *CD* III/1, 345.

<sup>226</sup> *CD* III/1, 347.

<sup>227</sup> *CD* III/1, 348.

By way of continuity, the Christian religion cannot know it is created to be the true religion unless God reveals he continually creates it to be so. The Christian religion cannot, then, draw upon its religious intuitions to justify its assertion that it is the true religion but must listen only to the Word of God by whom it is divinely created to be the true religion. Barth further argues that,

This self-disclosure of the Creator, i.e., this revelation of His own infallible knowledge of His existence (the ground of all else that exists) is the living confrontation which meets the creaturely consciousness and in virtue of which knowledge of existence, reality and being is possible and real even outside God, in the order of the creature which is distinct from Him.<sup>228</sup>

This is why the human cannot point to any innate capacity or willingness to substantiate her existence, as this is only possible by divine revelation. For Barth, the human's acknowledgement of her existence, as known from divine revelation, "is wholly and exclusively an echo and response of the creature to what is said to him by his Creator. It is neither a spontaneous nor a receptive accomplishment of the creature, for it does not rest upon any of his inherent faculties, nor is any of these faculties capable of this recognition. It merely takes place."<sup>229</sup> God's actualisation of creation is beneficial because only by his actualisation of creation will it know that it truly exists and that he is its creator. Thus, Barth can simply declare that, "The creature is. We say this because God is, and we are told by God Himself that He and therefore the creature is. God is real. His creation is actualisation. Hence His creature is real."<sup>230</sup>

Barth continues his argument for God's actualisation of creation by pointing to its gracious character. While creation needs to be actualised to be known as

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<sup>228</sup> *CD III/1*, 348-349.

<sup>229</sup> *CD III/1*, 349.

<sup>230</sup> *CD III/1*, 350.

benefit (and as justification) God needs no actualisation as he is fully actualised in the fulness of his trinitarian being in which he covenants with creation before he creates it. Regarding the covenantal aspect of God's actualisation of creation Barth states that, "The God who posits and guarantees creaturely existence, and by whose self-disclosure it is revealed and secured to the creature, is He who in and through His creative activity has established His covenant with the creature."<sup>231</sup> Barth then argues that even though God has eternally covenanted with creation in pre-temporal eternity this does not mean his actualisation of it is not free and unloving; rather, it is God's self-determined choice to love creation in his freedom. Barth argues that, "As Creator [God] does not exist as a monad, but in the overflowing plenitude of His life as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in the desire and love in which He does not will to keep His glory to Himself but also to magnify it outside Himself, in which He does not will to live only for Himself but also for another distinct from Himself."<sup>232</sup> It is God's free and faithful relation to his creation, as founded upon his gracious election of it, which is the reason for his actualisation of creation. Without this emphasis upon and recognition of the gracious choice of God the human cannot know that they and creation even exist. Barth declares that,

The gracious God is, and the creature which receives His grace is. For the God of grace discloses Himself to the creature as the One who is, and in so doing discloses the fact that the creature also is. He is real, and, actualised in creation, His creature is also real. It is permitted to be. This is the more precise Christian formulation of the existence of the Creator and the creature, and of the recognition of their existence.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> *CD* III/1, 363.

<sup>232</sup> *CD* III/1, 363

<sup>233</sup> *CD* III/1, 364.

Barth completes his argument for the affirmation of creation in §42.3 (“Creation as Justification”) by stating that, “Under whatever aspect [creation] may present itself, whatever it may make of itself, whatever may become of it, however it is to be interpreted in detail and as a whole, it is good to the extent that it is, and it is therefore right for God and before Him, in the judgment of the One to whom it owes its existence.”<sup>234</sup> Trevor Hart contends that, “in §42[.3] Barth develops the notion that in some sense justification is analytic in creation itself. That is to say, the very fact that God creates carries with it the implication that what he creates is ‘justified.’”<sup>235</sup> Furthermore, Sherman argues that, “the affirmation of the goodness of Creation is not based upon one’s own conjecture and/or empirical observation. One may, of course, take this route, but Barth asserts that it is not the Christian one.”<sup>236</sup> For Barth, creation does not possess its goodness; rather, God declares it good as founded upon his eternal covenant, which is his choice to be with and for his creation as revealed in Jesus Christ. According to Barth,

Creation may be good, and is good, because the judgment with which God confronts it is good, because the God [who] is good who in actualising it also justifies it. In echoing this divine judgment, in acknowledging and accepting the justification achieved in its actualisation, the creature may recognise himself and his fellow-creature as good.<sup>237</sup>

This “judgment” is the mode of God’s relation to creation and only by his self-revelation can one know creation is good. Sherman argues that, “Christians affirm the goodness of Creation because they affirm the goodness of God the Creator, because they first *encountered* the grace of God the Redeemer, who fulfills his

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<sup>234</sup> CD III/1, 366.

<sup>235</sup> Trevor Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 51.

<sup>236</sup> Sherman, *Shift to Modernity*, 82.

<sup>237</sup> CD III/1, 366.

covenant in the ‘God-man’ [...] Jesus Christ.”<sup>238</sup> In order to judge creation as good, priority must always be given to Jesus Christ because, according to Sherman, in him “there is an unbreakable covenantal link between the divine and mundane, the Creator and creature. This is the Christian starting point, and this is the reason Christian affirmations about Creation are fundamentally distinct from, and independent of all other worldviews and philosophies.”<sup>239</sup>

It is at this point, however, that a discontinuity arises between creation as justification and the Christian religion as divinely created. In §17.3 Barth believes that one can only speak about the Christian religion as the true religion as one speaks of an individual Christian as a “justified sinner.”<sup>240</sup> The discontinuity emerges because, for Barth, creation is good even though it is threatened and attacked by “the Nothingness,” whereas the Christian religion is faithless and yet is divinely created (i.e., sublimated) to be the true religion. Therefore, Barth’s use of the *simul iustus et peccator* does not originally and finally apply to creation but only to the Christian religion. Barth writes of creation that the “reality which it has and is, is not just any reality. Its being is not neutral; it is not bad but good. Because it is, and is thus distinct from nothingness, it is distinct from the bad and evil.”<sup>241</sup> The Christian religion, however, is bad and evil because, as a religion, it actively perpetuates Adamic sin by which it alienates itself from God through its faithlessness; and yet, because of the creative self-revelation of God, the Christian religion is sublimated

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<sup>238</sup> Sherman, *Shift to Modernity*, 82. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>239</sup> Sherman, *Shift to Modernity*, 83.

<sup>240</sup> See *CD I/2*, 325.

<sup>241</sup> *CD III/1*, 366. Creation, however, will be finally purified when it becomes the “new heavens and the new earth.” Cf. Isa 66:22; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev 21:1.

into the true religion. Furthermore, to speak of creation as justification does not mean it needs justification because it is sinful or evil, but to distinguish it from “the Nothingness,” which God rejects. By way of further discontinuity, God rejects the Christian religion along with all other religions and yet in his gracious, sovereign freedom chooses to reveal himself to and create the Christian religion into the true religion in contrast to all other religions. Sherman remarks that one “know[s] this because it is visible in the divine-human covenant fulfilled in Christ. This is the Yes of God toward Creation; there is a No of God, a divine rejection, but it is directed not against Creation or any part of it, but against the ‘nonreal,’ against ‘nothingness.’”<sup>242</sup> God speaks his “No” to the Christian religion because it attempts to fabricate and justify itself before a deity thereby actualising “the Nothingness.” Moreover, creation is good and God only speaks his “Yes” to it; the Christian religion, however, is faithless and God speaks his “No” to it before he speaks his “Yes” which is its divine creation. According to Greggs, for Barth, “God’s Yes to creation is always louder than the No He might utter to [all] aspects of fallen creation.”<sup>243</sup>

In the light of these discontinuities, it is tempting to conclude that Barth’s argument for the divine creation of the Christian religion having significant continuity with his argument for creation as justification is quite tenuous. That conclusion, however, is near-sighted because the divine creation of the Christian religion is never strictly identical with creation as justification. And yet these discontinuities should not be glossed over or ignored but taken with an utmost seriousness within their inherent limitations. Rather than allow the discontinuities to determine the relationship between the divine creation of the Christian religion and

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<sup>242</sup> Sherman, *Shift to Modernity*, 82.

<sup>243</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 93. This also includes all religions.



creation as justification the core similarity between the two will be emphasized, i.e., the God of Jesus Christ who creates the Christian religion and justifies his creation. Even though God speaks his “No” to “the Nothingness” that threatens creation and the faithlessness that corrupts the Christian religion Barth believes the “basis and essence and criterion of the good must step in and so speak in the hearing of the creature that there can be no negative decision or neutral recession from the positive affirmation, the positive being so commanded that even in its freedom the creature has to appropriate it and make it without doubt or hesitation.”<sup>244</sup> And yet, certain continuities still exist between Barth’s doctrines of the divine creation of the Christian religion and creation as justification, e.g., the impossibility of constructing a deity who creates the Christian religion into the true religion and justifies its creation. Barth confesses that, “It is certainly tempting in the valuation, desire and supposed certainty, to try to procure for our procedure an ultimate guarantee by invoking a supreme name.”<sup>245</sup>

Barth then proceeds to argue why one cannot appeal to the name of a supreme deity in order to justify creation. Barth asks and answers: “Can the invocation of a *Deus Optimus Maximus* be in itself more than the pathetic asseveration of a thesis [*die pathetische Beteuerung einer These*] which as the product of a creaturely mind can have only the force of a hypothesis even with the help of this asseveration? It cannot and it will not.”<sup>246</sup> For Barth, the Christian doctrine of creation should not witness to the name of a nebulous or abstract deity (e.g., *Deus Optimus Maximus*) but to the God of Jesus Christ. However, for those

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<sup>244</sup> CD III/1, 367.

<sup>245</sup> CD III/1, 367.

<sup>246</sup> CD III/1, 368; *Kirchliche Dogmatik* III/1 (Zürich: EVZ, 1945), 420. Hereafter *KD* III/1.

who still desire to employ an abstract deity to justify creation (and themselves),

Barth argues that this position can

only with relative certainty [...] assert and maintain itself against other and opposed theses and hypotheses, against all kinds of more or less radical complaints about life, and especially against various attempts at qualification. Its vindication of being is always open to attack, and has in fact been attacked, on the very same ground on which it thinks it can and should justify life. It can never affirm the goodness of life without in the same breath having to doubt it.<sup>247</sup>

The result of constructing an abstract deity is evidenced in the human anxiety to create doctrines with irreformable authority in order to justify this creation as good and even “God” for creating it. Moreover, the most concrete act in which a human evidences her anxiety over justifying creation is seen in her cognitive idolatry.

According to Barth, “Divinity is in this respect only the monstrous concave mirror [*der ungeheure Hohlspiegel*] in which the most various opinions of the creaturely mind are reflected and can be recognised.”<sup>248</sup> In the light of Barth’s response the only possible way that remains to understand creation as justification is by the name of Jesus Christ. This does not mean the name of Jesus Christ is at the Christian religion’s disposal or simply ornamental. In continuity with §17.3 Barth rebukes those who assume they can utilize the name of Jesus Christ at whim, for

this name describes no less than the creation and the Creator of the Christian religion, [hence] we cannot act as though it were at our disposal, adding it to our supposedly Christian doctrines as an expository or confirmatory addendum, or even as a critical proviso, conjuring with it in relation to our supposedly Christian enterprises as with a magic force, interposing it as the pretext and purpose of our supposedly Christian institutions, like a stained-glass window in an otherwise completed Church.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> CD III/1, 368.

<sup>248</sup> CD III/1, 368; KD III/1, 421.

<sup>249</sup> CD I/2, 347-348.

The God of Jesus Christ alone creates all other reality distinct from him and justifies it. As creation is the object of God's "Yes" as distinguished, separated, and preserved from "the Nothingness," so too the Christian religion is the locus upon which God, in the name of Jesus Christ, pours out his Holy Spirit in order to sublate it thereby creating it into the true religion in spite of its faithlessness. Regarding the divine creation of the Christian religion it is argued that Barth could easily be speaking about creation as justification when he states that, "Fullness rather than nothingness is there and only there where the name Jesus Christ really is the beginning of all things as the Creator of our doctrine, our undertakings, and our institutions."<sup>250</sup> By way of discontinuity, however, is that creation as justification derives from Barth's understanding of the eternal act of God to be with and for his creation in the election of Jesus Christ. According to Barth, creation's "rightness, goodness, worth and perfection spring from its correspondence to the work of God's own Son as resolved from all eternity and fulfilled in time."<sup>251</sup> Without the eternal act of election, the primal decision of God to create this creation and not another (or even to create at all) would be absurd and capricious. This is why, according to Hart, "we may note that the judgment 'it is good' uttered by God in the beginning is made not in relation to some unknown divine blueprint, but precisely in relation to the fulfillment of His divine purpose in creation and covenant *as that has taken place in Jesus Christ*."<sup>252</sup> Therefore, God justifies creation because he has been eternally chosen it in Jesus Christ. Hart argues that, "creation is *recht*, that is to say, precisely insofar as it is *capax infiniti*, able to be taken up by God in the incarnation and

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<sup>250</sup> *On Religion*, 110.

<sup>251</sup> *CD III/1*, 370.

<sup>252</sup> Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth*, 51. Author's emphasis.

brought concretely to its *telos* in fulfillment of the covenant. The divine judgment is thus proleptic. The creation is *gerechtigt* due to its *Gerechtigkeit* in relation to God's action in Jesus Christ."<sup>253</sup> The self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ contradicts all interpretations of creation and the Christian religion, be they optimistic, pessimistic, or a varied synthesis, providing instead a correct interpretation of both. Barth states that, "What we consider to be the truth about the created world is one thing. Quite another is the covenant of grace, the work of Jesus Christ, for the sake and in fulfillment of which creation exists as it is."<sup>254</sup> Thus, Barth's arguments for the Christian religion as divinely created and creation as justification share a similar determination, i.e., Jesus Christ who creates both and is the means by which we know God justifies this creation and that he creates the Christian religion into the true religion. Barth states that by "reference to the noetic connexion between Jesus Christ and creation we emphasise something which has been strangely overlooked and neglected, or at any rate not developed in detail, either in more recent or even in earlier theology."<sup>255</sup>

However, not all accept Barth's doctrine of creation, particularly its teleology. Crisp argues that Barth's doctrine of the teleology of creation is incoherent because, on his reading of Barth's doctrine of creation, the salvation of creation by God is its ultimate end and not God's self-glorification. Crisp remarks that, if "we say Barth thinks that [the teleology of creation] is the redemption of all humanity in and through the work of Christ, this would appear to mean that God's end in creation is not, or is not ultimately (as has often been traditionally thought) his

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<sup>253</sup> Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth*, 51-52. Emphasis mine.

<sup>254</sup> *CD III/1*, 370. Author's emphasis.

<sup>255</sup> *CD III/1*, 29.

self-glorification. It is instead the reconciliation of humanity to Godself.”<sup>256</sup> Crisp believes, rather, that the self-glorification of God is the ultimate end of creation and its salvation is a penultimate means to that end. Crisp argues that,

God glorifies himself, according to a number of classical theologians (sometimes dubbed “perfect being theologians”) because it would be an imperfection in God not to do so. A *maximally* perfect being (that is, a being who has all possible perfections to a maximal degree) cannot, after all, seek to glorify something other than himself, for that would be to glorify something that is less than maximally perfect (assuming God alone is maximally perfect). And giving glory to something less than maximally perfect would itself be an imperfect act. But God is maximally perfect, so he cannot glorify something less perfect than himself, the maximally perfect being.<sup>257</sup>

Here Crisp and Barth diverge, particularly because Crisp chooses not to begin with the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the sole determination of his knowledge of God the Creator, his choice to create, and the goal of his creation. It is contended that Crisp postulates a speculative account of the teleology of creation because he founds it upon a metaphysical degree of being and constructs from that account a narrative in which the salvation of creation by God is subordinate to the self-glorification of God. Thus, Crisp does not provide a distinctly and thoroughgoing *Christian* account of creation as justification. Instead, he reveals his *a priori* methodological dependence on the strictures of human logic and the inevitable concomitant anxiety to justify creation and the end for which God created it. Barth deplores and departs from this (so-called) classical position because, as he states,

Even in the invocation of the idea of God, in the appeal to the *Deus Optimus Maximus*, and therefore in the extreme intensification of its assertion, it is still itself in supreme need of justification. It cannot escape the disquieting consideration that unfortunately the same idea of God can also be invoked in support of other theses and hypotheses. It unfortunately cannot be said of the

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<sup>256</sup> Crisp, “Barth on Creation,” 81.

<sup>257</sup> Crisp, “Barth on Creation,” 82. Author’s emphasis. Crisp mentions Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, and Jonathan Edwards as three such examples of “perfect being theologians.”

unaided mind of man that it can be filled with the idea of the goodness of God, for its optimism may easily turn into pessimism and even indifference, and again it will also feel it necessary and possible to find for its judgments and fears, but also for its weariness and half-heartedness, and finally its own attempts to absolutise its corresponding judgments concerning being, something like an objective basis and background by trying to anchor all this in an ultimate reality described by the name of God or a term ostensibly equivalent to this name.<sup>258</sup>

In contrast to Crisp's "perfect being theology," Barth is content and courageous on the basis of divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ alone to argue how creation and the divine justification of it is not merely instrumental for and penultimate to the self-glorification of God but is the locus in which God shares his glory in fellowship with his reconciled creation. Barth contends that,

God gave Himself up to the lowliness and misery of creaturely existence because otherwise the latter could not share in His divine glory. By investing it with His glory, by raising and empowering weak and erring man in the person of His Son to say Yes with Him, He abandoned the prior and necessary No and cast the lowliness and misery of man behind Him, so that His participation in this negative aspect of existence became only a transient episode.<sup>259</sup>

Therefore, contra Crisp, Barth does not posit a deity who merely saves creation as a means for greater glorification; rather, God is the one who – in the overflowing effluence of his glory which is undiminished by the contingency of creation and the temporal corruption of it by "the Nothingness" – reveals his glory in (and not because of) the justification of creation as revealed in Jesus Christ. For Barth, God does not exist in sublime, apathetic detachment from his creation but has entered into it in Jesus Christ in order that creation may share in his glory rather than merely being an instrument to that end.

Presupposing Barth's critique and re-formulation of the teleology of creation is correct, it will now be applied to the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine

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<sup>258</sup> *CD* III/1, 368.

<sup>259</sup> *CD* III/1, 384.

creation. If, for Barth, the salvation of creation is not the means to the end of the self-glorification of God but is identical with it, then the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation is also not the soteriological means to a doxological end but is the manifestation of the glory of God in which the Christian religion participates. Tanner remarks that, the

completely unmerited and incredibly beneficent act of God in Christ whereby God destroys sin and exalts us to fellowship with God by taking our place as faithful covenant partner is surrounded in time and space by a number of other acts of God that are similarly free and loving, acts of God which God's act in Christ presupposes or implies.<sup>260</sup>

One of these "other acts of God" is the divine creation of the Christian religion for, inasmuch as it is continually created into the true religion its sublimation does not – like the *Deus Optimus Maximus* – consist in being enamoured in its own glory; rather, it is sublimated to testify that it is the proleptic and microcosmic creation in and through which God has chosen to reveal his redemption of all religious humans from their faithlessness. Tanner states that,

In Christ, finally, God is not merely the partner of a particular group of human beings, but actually becomes human in a free act of delivering God's human partners from the threat of sin and death. That act of becoming human is a greater gift too in that it communicates God's partnership to all humanity, and through humanity to the whole creation, while elevating the character of the relation to God enjoyed by creatures: the church (and through the church, all of humanity and the world) becomes no mere partner, but indirectly united with God in and through Jesus Christ who is immediately in himself both God and a human being.<sup>261</sup>

With this knowledge ready at hand, the Christian religion should engage humbly and confidently with all other religions by proclaiming to them how God has acted eternally in Jesus Christ to create it into the true religion just as he has created only this good creation. Even though the Christian religion is faithless like all other

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<sup>260</sup> Tanner, "Creation," 115. Emphasis mine.

<sup>261</sup> Tanner, "Creation," 115.

religions and creation is still assailed by “the Nothingness,” the God of Jesus Christ continually creates the Christian religion into true religion and justifies this creation as good. Greggs appropriately states that,

Rather than an engagement in speculative and abstract games regarding the nature of God, a religionless expression of Christian theology will seek to emphasize the God who is known by His acts and events for all creation. This determines that, even in its brokenness and sinfulness, creation is the creation which God wills ultimately to redeem, rather than ultimately destroy.<sup>262</sup>

Barth concludes his argument for creation as justification in §42.3 in four points. He states that hitherto “we have only asserted and not explained that the creation of God is the justification of creaturely being, so that His self-revelation discloses its affirmation by God, and therefore His good-pleasure resting upon it, and therefore its perfection.”<sup>263</sup> The first point explains how the necessity of “the divine revelation not only transcends the two contradictory aspects [i.e., “Yes” and “No”] and thus relativises the contrasting judgments of existence but implies primarily and particularly a confirmation of these two aspects and judgments (as opposed to their neutralisation by doubt).”<sup>264</sup> This is because Barth’s doctrine of election determines his doctrine of creation as justification since creation, and all the events of world-occurrence, stand under this twofold determination. Barth believes the answer to the question of human existence, especially its “brighter side” and “shadow side,” is found in the “fact that the revelation of God the Creator so closely binds the life

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<sup>262</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 93. Greggs, however, has a misplaced hope that there will ever be, this side of the eschaton, a “religionless expression of Christian theology” because if Barth is correct that one can only speak of Christianity as the true religion as one speaks of the Christian as a justified sinner, then there will always be the reality of faithlessness that infects, corrupts, and condemns all Christian theology (as one aspect of its multifaceted religiosity) even though it is sublimated by God in the event of his divine revelation in Jesus Christ as known in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>263</sup> *CD III/1*, 375.

<sup>264</sup> *CD III/1*, 375.



which He has created with the covenant in which He willed to make himself the Lord and Helper and Saviour of man; with the reconciliation of the world with Himself to be accomplished in Jesus Christ.”<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, because Barth does not reprimand the traditional understanding of predestination as two distinct divine decrees (i.e., election and rejection), which eternally and irreversibly divide, he can argue that creation as justification is

on the one hand an exaltation [*Erheblichkeit*] and dignity of the creature in the sight of God (for otherwise how could it be His partner, or be accepted by Him?); and on the other hand the equally clear need and peril of the creature before Him (for otherwise how could it be so exclusively referred to His lordship and help in the covenant, and to reconciliation with God in the person of His Son?). God created man to lift [*zu erheben*] him in His own Son into fellowship with Himself. This is the positive meaning of human existence. But this elevation [*diese Erhebung*] presupposes a wretchedness of human and all existence which His own Son will share and bear. This is the negative meaning of creation.<sup>266</sup>

It is in the light of these arguments that it is contended that although Barth’s mature doctrine of election significantly influences his doctrine of creation, particularly in §42, and shows a clear discontinuity from his treatment of the divine creation of the Christian religion in §17.3, there still remains a significant continuity – the anhypostasis of Jesus Christ. In the following quotation Barth discusses creation as justification, which could also equally apply to the anhypostatic creation of the Christian religion. Barth states that,

It is not nothing but something; yet it is something on the edge of nothing, bordering it and menaced by it, and having no power of itself to overcome the danger. It is destined for God as certainly as it is actual by Him alone; yet it is not incapable of being unfaithful to its origin and destiny and becoming the instrument of sin. *It has subsistence; yet it does not have such subsistence as it can secure and maintain for itself. It lives; yet it does not live in such a way that its life is guaranteed in its own strength against destruction and death.* It may hope in its Creator; yet it must also despair of its own ability to build for itself a

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<sup>265</sup> CD III/1, 375.

<sup>266</sup> CD III/1, 375-376. Cf. KD III/1, 430. Although Barth does not use *Aufhebung* he uses a close cognate (*Erhebung*) that conveys a very similar meaning to that of *Aufhebung*.

future. And it is in this way that it stands in the presence of its Creator according to His self-revelation.<sup>267</sup>

Barth's second point concerns the transcendence and unification of the twofold determination of the "Yes" and "No" as revealed in Jesus Christ. Barth remarks that,

the self-disclosure of God the Creator does not merely confirm but transcends these two aspects, and therefore these two views of life. It includes them, but it is also superior to them and independent of them [....] It speaks of a very different exaltation [*Erhebung*] than that which the greatest exultation [*Jubel*] of being can proclaim.<sup>268</sup>

Again, Barth points to the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus of Nazareth as the means by which God transcends in order to unify the twofold determination, because no matter how loud the creature speaks concerning the negative and positive experiences of world-occurrence, the Word of God always transcends, relativizes, and properly relates the creature's optimism and pessimism. Barth answers the questions of why, how, and to what end the self-revelation of God transcends and unifies the twofold determination of "Yes" and "No" when he states that,

The answer is that it consists in the fact that the self-revelation of God is His own Word; that in it the Creator Himself has become creature. The secret, the meaning and the goal of creation is that it reveals, or that there is revealed in it, the covenant and communion between God and man, and therefore the fulfillment of being as a whole, which is so serious and far-reaching that the Word by which God created all things, even God Himself, becomes as one of His creatures, being there Himself like everything else, like all created reality distinct from Himself, and thus making His own its twofold determination, its greatness and wretchedness, its infinite dignity and infinite frailty, its hope and its despair, its rejoicing and its sorrow. This is what has taken place in Jesus Christ as the meaning and end of creation. His humiliation [*Erniedrigung*] and exaltation [*Erhöhung*] as the Son of God are the self-revelation of God the Creator.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> CD III/1, 376. Emphasis mine.

<sup>268</sup> CD III/1, 376; KD III/1, 431.

<sup>269</sup> CD III/1, 377; KD III/1, 432. Here one sees the movement of divine sublimation.

Because the varied, fragmentary, and perpetually incorrect interpretations of creation are transcended and corrected in the light of the self-revelation of God one also sees, by way of continuity, how the Christian religion and the interpretations thereof (whether optimistic or pessimistic) are also transcended by the sublimating activity of God in his self-revelation. Just as creation must hear both the “Yes” and “No” of God in Jesus Christ to be justified, so too must the Christian religion hear the same “Yes” and “No,” for only by hearing and confessing this truth can it be created into the true religion. Like “the Nothingness,” all other religions apart from the Christian religion only hear God’s “No,” but like creation the Christian religion also hears God’s “Yes” which confirms and overcomes the “No” spoken to its faithlessness.

Barth’s third point for creation as justification concerns creation’s perfection. Barth argues that “the self-revelation of God the Creator [...] discloses the perfection of being, the divine good-pleasure resting upon it, its justification by its Creator, and therefore that it is right as it is, that it is good in its totality, indeed that it is the best.”<sup>270</sup> The perfection of creation, however, is not the “Yes” and “No” of God held in dualistic antithesis or eternal equilibrium. According to Barth there have been and will be those who try to harmonize the “Yes” and “No” and thereby neutralize them in an attempt to exist in a sublime detachment from the needs and vicissitudes of world-occurrence. Barth argues that,

It is understandable that this coordination has been constantly sought and attempted in different ways. But apart from divine revelation this has always been at the expense of the full seriousness of one or other aspect, at the expense of the necessary rigour of the judgment demanded on both sides. For instance, the No heard in this matter may be rendered innocuous by bringing it into peaceful continuity with a much more triumphant Yes. Conversely, the Yes may be slurred over and made only the syllable before a much more crushing No.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> *CD* III/1, 378.

<sup>271</sup> *CD* III/1, 378.

Similarly, there are those who interpret and attempt to relate to the Christian religion on the assumed basis that it is (or should be made) a socially and politically neutralized religion, paralleling those who do not accept the totality of creation, which includes its imperfections. Hence, Barth utilizes the “name of God” to substantiate his argument for why God justifies creation and, in the same way, it is only by the “name of Jesus Christ” by which the Christian religion is created into the true religion. Barth declares that,

the name of God is the name of the Lord of all life. To hear His voice is to be confronted by the decision which has been taken on life as a whole, and by which it is determined and ruled in both its aspects. And to hear God and assent to this fulfilled decision is to be forced to recognise the goodness of existence as determined and ruled by Him. At this point everything depends on whether it is really the name of God which is heard and the decision taken by Him to which assent is given. A surrogate cannot perform for us the service which is necessary if we are to achieve a positive attitude to creation and therefore to our own and all created being.<sup>272</sup>

The “name of God,” however, is not an anonymous, abstract deity (e.g., *Deus Optimus Maximus*) but the God who reveals himself in the “name of Jesus Christ” and thereby justifies creation and creates the Christian religion. According to Barth, God the Creator “willed to endure, and has endured, and still endures the contradiction in creaturely life [... as] revealed in His self-revelation.”<sup>273</sup> God endures the contradiction of his creation in the incarnation of the Word of God, meaning the creature cannot find in itself the explanation of its contradiction against, nor its rectification before God. According to Barth, “the real goodness of God is that the contradiction of creation has not remained alien to Himself. Primarily and

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<sup>272</sup> CD III/1, 379.

<sup>273</sup> CD III/1, 380.

supremely He has made it His own, and only then caused it to be reflected in the life of the creature. His rejoicing and sorrow preceded ours.”<sup>274</sup>

Barth then argues how the perfection of this imperfect creation points to the incarnation, particularly the Word of God’s participation in the antinomies of world-occurrence. In Jesus Christ God has definitively overcome “the Nothingness” that threatens creation and thereby justifies creation. Barth states that,

It is an act of providential care which [God] performs when He surrenders His own Son to the lowliness and misery of creaturely existence. He sees the hopeless peril of the created world which He has snatched from nothingness but which is still so near to nothingness. He sees that it cannot and will not check itself on the edge of the abyss. He sees its weakness and the power of temptation. And yet in this created world He wills to manifest His glory.<sup>275</sup>

Just as God preserves creation from succumbing to “the Nothingness” so too he creates the Christian religion so that it is not consumed by its own faithlessness, for even though creation is justified and the Christian religion is divinely created they are still susceptible to corruption and dissolution; and yet God is gracious to creation and the Christian religion as revealed in the incarnation of his Word. Barth argues that God “takes up [the creature’s] cause at this point and shares in his creatureliness. He does this in order to rescue and preserve the creature. He does it because it is unable to rescue and preserve itself.”<sup>276</sup> It is in this sense that Barth speaks of creation as imperfectly perfect in its current mode of existence and, by way of continuity, the Christian religion is the true religion as *simul iustus et peccator*. Therefore, one knows creation is justified, and the Christian religion is the true religion, by the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, even though they may

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<sup>274</sup> CD III/1, 380.

<sup>275</sup> CD III/1, 383.

<sup>276</sup> CD III/1, 384.

continually desire to exacerbate the imperfections of creation (e.g., death, natural disasters, etc.) and also the relativity or even falsity of the Christian religion. Barth argues that, in Jesus Christ,

the created world is already perfect in spite of its imperfection, for the Creator is Himself a creature, both sharing in its creaturely peril, and guaranteeing and already actualising its hope. If the created world is understood in the light of the divine mercy revealed in Jesus Christ, of the divine participation in it eternally resolved in Jesus Christ and fulfilled by Him in time; if it is thus understood as the arena, instrument and object of His living action, of the once for all divine contesting and overcoming of its imperfection, its justification and perfection will infallibly be perceived and it will be seen to be the best of all possible worlds.<sup>277</sup>

One's knowledge of creation as justification and the divine creation of the Christian religion as revealed in Jesus Christ contains both the positive and negative truth, and thus denies the neutralizing and/or synthesizing of the optimistic "Yes" and the pessimistic "No." According to Barth, the "Yes of God the Creator" tells us how one

will realise better than any pessimism [and optimism] that man is not capable of a well-founded and certain judgment in this matter, of a genuine assurance and elevation of the creature in face of the infinite perils which surround it, of its real rescue and deliverance and ultimate glorification; that all this can be accomplished only by God's own action and truly appropriated only in acknowledgement of this divine action; and that apart from this relationship it can only be an obstinate and ineffective assertion which man is quite unable to prove.<sup>278</sup>

Thus, for Barth, creation (with its imperfections) is justified and the Christian religion (with its faithlessness) is continually created, because their *telos* has been revealed in Jesus Christ in whom God speaks his triumphant "Yes" and its servile "No," which means, for Barth, that

Christian faith realises better than any optimism that the final Word about creation is positive and not negative. For that reason it can and will take in all seriousness the penultimate negative word which is also true in this connexion, but only

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<sup>277</sup> CD III/1, 385.

<sup>278</sup> CD III/1, 385.

within its own limits, because it is only in its penultimate character that it is the Word of God.<sup>279</sup>

Barth's fourth and final point concerns the epistemic surety of creation as justification. He again affirms his Christocentric commitment when he states that, "Our point of departure is the fact that the living action of God in Jesus Christ, by which the two aspects of existence are confirmed and transcended and thus reveal the perfection of creation, makes it quite impossible for the man who knows it to maintain an attitude of neutrality in face of it."<sup>280</sup> However, for Barth, one only knows these truths as they are confronted in the event of revelation because the "history of Jesus Christ as the end and meaning of creation is not a drama which is played out at a remote distance and which [a human] can view as an interested or disinterested spectator."<sup>281</sup> This revelation first informs so that "we are those to whom salvation has come, whose being has been healed and sanctified, not by ourselves but by the action of God, by the divine justification directed towards us in Jesus Christ, healing and sanctifying without possibility of demerit."<sup>282</sup> Second, God confronts humans to commandeer them to witness to his gracious act of creation since Christians "are not mere hearers of the divine revelation. We are ourselves its witnesses [...]. We are thus placed under the command of God to affirm what He affirms and deny what He denies in the order and relationship in which He does Himself."<sup>283</sup> The movement of God towards his creation reveals how its justification is not intrinsically but eccentrically effected in the gracious act of God in Jesus

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<sup>279</sup> *CD III/1*, 386.

<sup>280</sup> *CD III/1*, 387.

<sup>281</sup> *CD III/1*, 387.

<sup>282</sup> *CD III/1*, 387-388.

<sup>283</sup> *CD III/1*, 388.

Christ, and just as Jesus of Nazareth does not autonomously subsist in his own hypostasis but only anhypostatically in union with the Son of God, so too creation and the Christian religion exist solely by God's creation (and preservation) of them. In fact, by drawing upon Barth's doctrine of providence one sees even more clearly the continuities and discontinuities between the continual creation of the Christian religion (i.e., its sublimation) and the continual preservation of creation (i.e., its justification). Barth states:

Creation and providence are not identical. In creation it is a matter of the establishment, the incomparable beginning of the relationship between Creator and creature; in providence of its continuation and history in a series of different but comparable moments. In creation we see particularly the difference of the nature, position and function of the Creator on the one side, and the creature on the other; in providence their reciprocal relationship, the address of the Creator to the existence of His creature on the one side, and the participation of the creature in the existence of its Creator on the other. The act of creation takes place in a specific first time; the time of providence is the whole of the rest of time right up to its end. *Creation has no external basis apart from the free will and resolve of God, and no internal [basis] apart from the mystery of the election of grace in the divine being itself*; providence has its basis not only in God's unconditioned freedom and decision and the mystery of His election of grace, but also externally in the presupposed being of the creature and internally in its neediness in relation to the Creator.<sup>284</sup>

Furthermore, the Christian religion is divinely created to be the true religion by an initial and continuing self-revelatory act of God in Jesus Christ in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and this initial and continual creative act of God is analogous to his justification of creation, which Barth describes as the "virtuous circle" of creation, confrontation, and re-creation. Barth declares that,

This is the necessary and therefore the sure confidence of those whom God has first drawn into His confidence, and *repeatedly* draws into His confidence, by the revelation of His activity, in view of which this confidence is *continually* renewed and its certainty *continually* achieved and confirmed. *We are in a circle in which*

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<sup>284</sup> CD III/3, 8. Emphasis mine.



*we may and must move, but in which we can do so only in one direction, and which we can no longer leave.*<sup>285</sup>

This “virtuous circle” is indicative of creation and the Christian religion, as determined by the God of Jesus Christ who elected to create creation and thereby justify it and to create continually the Christian religion into the true religion. Greggs states that,

As another distinct from [God], creation is the self-willed expression of God’s desire to be for another. Creation in all its variety and particularity must be seen as having its determination in the eternal will, decree and overflowing love of God to be for another, personified in the second person of the trinity, who bears the name of Jesus Christ. Because of this, there can be no singular prioritization of those who are religious or of the church since God wills and elects all creation, and His work of reconciliation overcomes the negative aspects of created existence.<sup>286</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has argued that Barth’s doctrine of the Christian religion as the true religion, particularly its sublimation as divine creation, relates analogously to his doctrine of the affirmation of creation, especially its justification. For Barth, the anhypostasis of the humanity of Jesus Christ testifies how the Christian religion cannot be the true religion apart from being created by Jesus Christ and also how creation cannot be justified as good and perfect without being created and preserved by Jesus Christ. Although Barth composed his doctrine of the true religion before his mature doctrine of election and its subsequent influence on his doctrine of creation, it is contended that this discontinuity does not overturn his earlier argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine creation but actually strengthens it.

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<sup>285</sup> *CD* III/1, 388. Emphasis mine. For Barth’s discussion of the “virtuous circle” of revelation relative to religion see: *CD* I/2, 280.

<sup>286</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 92-93. Author’s emphasis. This thesis takes Greggs’ mention of the “negative aspects of created existence” to mean that which has been invaded and corrupted by “the Nothingness” and not the “shadow side of creation” because even the “shadow side” is part and parcel of God’s good creation.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE REDEMPTION OF RELIGION AS ELECTION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter it will be demonstrated that Barth's argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election has a significant continuity with and is illuminated by his mature doctrine of election in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, §34 ("The Election of the Community"). However, before discussing the contribution of §34 towards a better understanding of the second "aspect" of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election, one must begin with §17.3 and show how the concept of covenant plays an integral role in the relationship between Israel and the church. The concept of covenant, as it will be argued, is *the* theological continuity between the Christian religion as sublimated into the true religion and the church and Israel who comprise the one elect community of God. After the exegesis of §17.3 the chapter turns to §34 and shows, from the exegesis of its four subsections, that the twofold covenantal reality of the one elect community of God as Israel and the church further testifies how, for Barth, the Christian religion is sublimated into the true religion. According to Barth, this occurs particularly in Israel's witness to the judgment of God as the form of the community that hears the gospel but refuses to believe in it, making it the passing form of the community; whereas the church witnesses to the mercy of God because it hears and believes in the gospel making it the coming form of the community. The exegesis of §34 will also point out further lines of continuity between §17.3 and §34 by drawing upon Barth's doctrine of providence (§49.3) and the non-missiological relationship of the church to Israel (§72.4) in order to substantiate further his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election.

## **THE SUBLIMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AS ELECTION**

The Christian religion did not and cannot elect itself to be the true religion; rather, it is continually elected by the God of Jesus Christ to be the true religion. As was argued in chapter two how, for Barth, God continually creates the Christian religion into the true religion, so also he continually elects it to be the true religion. Barth states that, “As there is a *creatio continua* so also there is an *electio continua*, better described, of course, as God’s faithfulness and patience.”<sup>287</sup> In §17.3 Barth continues his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as the true religion by contending that of all the possible religions for God to elect to be the true religion, he elects the Christian religion as seen in its creation. Barth states that the

Christian religion did not possess any reality of its own. Considered in and for itself it never can. It is a mere possibility among a host of others. It did not and does not bring anything of its own to the name of Jesus Christ which makes it in any way worthy to be His creation and as such the true religion. If it is real, it is so on the basis of free election, grounded in the compassion and inconceivable good pleasure of God and nothing else.<sup>288</sup>

However, Barth does not deny the empirical and historical “realities” of the Christian religion but relativizes them so one cannot defer to them in their attempts to substantiate the Christian religion as the true (or truest) religion. According to Barth, one could “explain the necessity of the rise of Christianity in the light of the Judaistic development and the political, spiritual and moral circumstances of the Mediterranean world in the Imperial period. But in reality we can never seriously explain or deduce it from that source.”<sup>289</sup> Cannon clarifies by stating that,

Barth admits that the origin of Christianity can be interpreted with reference to such factors as the development of the Jewish tradition, and the political and

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<sup>287</sup> CD I/2, 349.

<sup>288</sup> CD I/2, 348.

<sup>289</sup> CD I/2, 348.

moral circumstances of the time. These are only secondary considerations, however, and the reality of [the] Christian religion can never be deduced from them. From an historical standpoint we can explain it only in terms of the covenant between God and Israel, and even then, only in terms of the fulfillment of that covenant in Christ.<sup>290</sup>

In fact, Barth denies all attempts to justify the Christian religion as the true religion through logical deduction from social-scientific evidence; rather, he grounds his knowledge of the Christian religion as the true religion upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as witnessed to in the church's covenantal relationship with Israel.

Barth explains that,

The only historical explanation and derivation worth considering seriously, the one from the history of the covenant made with Israel, can be compelling and plausible only if it is undertaken from the perspective of the fulfillment of the old covenant precisely in the name of Jesus Christ, from the perspective of the revelation that took place, was acknowledged, and was believed – and therefore under the presupposition of this name.<sup>291</sup>

The name of the one who elects the Christian religion to be the true religion is the same name that creates it – Jesus Christ. This “name” is the self-revelation of God who reveals that God, in his sovereign freedom, elects whichever religion he wants because there are no external, created factors that impinge upon the freedom of God to constrain him to elect the Christian religion. If there were any necessity for God to elect the Christian religion, it would be a self-imposed necessity for, according to Barth, “That it pleased God at that time and place and in that way to reveal Himself in the name of Jesus Christ, is something which had its necessity in itself, and not in the circumstances and conditions prior to that name. From that day to this it is

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<sup>290</sup> Cannon, *The Concept of Religion*, 125.

<sup>291</sup> *On Religion*, 111.

election by the free grace of God if in virtue of the name of Jesus Christ the Christian religion is a reality and not nothingness.”<sup>292</sup>

Furthermore, Barth’s argument regarding the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election has three ethical implications. The first concerns the Christian religion’s relationship to “Christendom.” Analogously, just as God is not bound to any religion outside of his sovereign election of it, so too the Christian religion is not ultimately bound to aspects and elements of a “Christian” society. According to Barth, the Christian religion “is not bound to what seems to have, and claims reality as Christianity, as Christian doctrine and conduct and institutions, as pursued by ostensibly Christian men or the ostensibly portions of humanity. Where it is bound, it has bound itself. And the fact that it has done so is always grace and not human or Christian merit.”<sup>293</sup> Moreover, the Christian religion cannot point to its election as the true religion simply because it is mostly or exclusively favoured by a particular state but only as it exists as the body of Christ, for only when the Christian religion is free from the state can it be free for the state. Barth argues that, “It is election if the Church is not only a favourite religious society, and there are others, but the body of Christ, if it not only has aspirations but inspirations, if its relation to state and society is a relation of genuine antithesis and therefore of genuine fellowship.”<sup>294</sup> The second ethical implication of the election of the Christian religion into the true religion is the negation of the possibility of boasting because it has been entrusted with its sacred texts and sacral liturgy. For Barth, the “fact that [the Christian religion] controls the Word and sacraments, and has Holy Scripture

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<sup>292</sup> *CD* I/2, 349.

<sup>293</sup> *CD* I/2, 349.

<sup>294</sup> *CD* I/2, 349.

and the Creeds, does not in any way alter the fact that it is all election, unmerited grace.”<sup>295</sup> Here Barth critiques Protestant Orthodoxy and Neo-Protestantism, particularly their respective assumptions as to why the Christian religion is the true religion. Barth states that, “No tradition, however faithful, and no consciousness of immediacy [*religiöses Gegenwartsbewußtein*], however vital, can ever prevent [the Christian religion] from being only the former [i.e., a mere human religion].”<sup>296</sup> This critique is reminiscent of Barth’s earlier criticism in §17.1 how Neo-Protestantism had wrongly inverted the irreversible relationship between revelation and religion, and how returning to a mere regurgitation of creeds, canons, and confessions is a theological cul-de-sac. Di Noia states that, “If Barth’s insistence on the priority of revelation over religion can be construed as a correction of neo-Protestant theology’s reversal of this order, then his account of the truth that can be claimed for the Christian religion might well be seen as a correction of older Protestant orthodoxy’s straightforward identification of Christianity with the true religion.”<sup>297</sup> Whereas Neo-Protestantism reversed the relationship between revelation and religion and conflated the Holy Spirit with the human spirit, according to Barth, Orthodox Protestantism chased the Holy Spirit into the texts of Holy Scripture and its confessional documents. Barth corrects both errors by pointing to the freedom of God in his election of the Christian religion. He states that, “if the alleged spiritual element [in the Christian religion] is genuinely of the Spirit, then it is only by the Holy Spirit who breathes as He will, it is only by election, and not by any immanent

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<sup>295</sup> *CD* I/2, 349.

<sup>296</sup> *CD* I/2, 349; *KD* I/2, 383.

<sup>297</sup> Di Noia, 252.

aptitude for genuine spirituality.”<sup>298</sup> The third and final ethical implication of the divine election of the Christian religion is the impossibility of it possessing and controlling its election by God because it must continually reach out for it. Barth critiques the assumption whereby one adds the adjective “Christian” to any and all functions and aspects of the church and deems them sacrosanct thereby rendering its prayerful obedience to God superfluous. Barth argues that,

We have to remember that the important adjective “Christian”—with which we expressly name the name of Jesus Christ—can never be a grasping at some possession of our own. It can only be a reaching out for the divine possession included in this name. It can only be an inquiry about election. It can only be a prayer that God will not turn away His face from us, that He well not weary of His unmerited faithfulness and patience. Where the adjective really means anything, election has already taken place.<sup>299</sup>

Throughout this exposition of Barth’s argument in §17.3 regarding the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election a discontinuity of doctrinal ordering relative to his mature doctrines of election and creation and the relationship thereof has become quite clear. In §17.3 it is obvious Barth discusses the divine election of the Christian religion *after* he argues for its divine creation, and even though it is helpful to point out and stress this discontinuity it will be argued that there remains a key theological similarity between Barth’s doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election and his mature doctrine of election – the covenantal relationship between Israel and the church. Even though Barth lightly touches on divine election in §17.3, much of his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election is further illuminated by his understanding of the covenantal relationship between Israel and the church. Thus, it is to §34 and the exposition thereof that this chapter now proceeds.

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<sup>298</sup> CD I/2, 349.

<sup>299</sup> CD I/2, 349-350.

## **THE ELECTION OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**

Before one can fully appreciate and understand Barth's doctrine of the election of the community and its subsequent elucidation of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election, a highly condensed summarization of Barth's mature doctrine of election must be provided, particularly the election of Jesus Christ. Regarding his mature doctrine of election, Greggs states that, "Barth's reworking of the doctrine of election in II/2 marks one of the most radical and exciting pieces of theology in the past 500 years. Placing the doctrine of election within the doctrine of God, Barth radically re-describes election, and breaks continuity not only with Calvin but also with Augustine in the radical departure that he makes."<sup>300</sup> Not only does Barth situate his doctrine of election within his doctrine of God but also applies his Christocentric methodology to his doctrine of God.<sup>301</sup> According to Barth,

Theology must begin with Jesus Christ, and not with general principles, however better, or, at any rate, more relevant and illuminating, they may appear to be: as though He were a continuation of the knowledge and Word of God, and not its root and origin, not indeed the very Word of God itself. Theology must also end with Him, and not with supposedly self-evident general conclusions from what is particularly enclosed and disclosed in Him: as though the fruits could be shaken from this tree; as though in the things of God there were anything general which we could know and designate in addition to and even independently of this particular.<sup>302</sup>

Moreover, Bruce McCormack contends that by Barth placing his doctrine of election within his doctrine of God and solely re-grounding it on the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, he can then propose its most innovative aspect – Jesus Christ is the object *and* subject of election. McCormack states that, "Jesus Christ is both the

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<sup>300</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 77.

<sup>301</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 3-506; *Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/2 (Zürich: EVZ, 1942), 1-563. Hereafter *CD* II/2 and *KD* II/2.

<sup>302</sup> *CD* II/2, 4.



Subject of election and its Object, the electing God and the elect human. That is the fundamental thesis which shapes the whole of Barth's doctrine of election."<sup>303</sup> It is his Christocentric reconstruction of the doctrine of election that enables Barth to construct not only the doctrine of God in strict accordance with and adherence to Jesus Christ but also the community elected by him. Barth declares,

That we know God and have God only in Jesus Christ means that we can know Him and have Him only with the man Jesus of Nazareth and with the people He represents. Apart from this man and apart from this people God would be a different, an alien God. According to the Christian perception the true God is what He is only in this movement, in the movement towards this man, in Him and through Him towards other men in their unity as His people.<sup>304</sup>

A further innovation of Barth's doctrine of election is its foundation. In contrast to the traditional Augustinian/Reformed understanding of election, which argues for a strict division of all humans into eternally immutable groups of the "elected" and "rejected," Barth begins (and ends) with Jesus Christ. Mangina contends that, "one of Barth's deepest criticisms of the traditional doctrine is that it assumes that 'election' [and 'rejection'] primarily concerns the individual."<sup>305</sup> Suzanne McDonald concurs by stating that, for the traditional view of election, "The determination of each human being's destiny either to salvation or to reprobation within or outside the covenant community is the content of God's electing decision, such that individual soteriology becomes the entire compass of the doctrine."<sup>306</sup>

However, for Barth, "the divine election of grace is an activity of God which has a

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<sup>303</sup> Bruce McCormack, "Grace and being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 93.

<sup>304</sup> *CD II/2*, 7.

<sup>305</sup> Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 69.

<sup>306</sup> Suzanne McDonald, *Re-imaging Election: Divine Election as Representing God to Others & Others to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 185.

definite goal and limit. Its direct and proper object is not individuals generally, but one individual—and only in Him the people called and united by Him, and only in that [are] people individuals in general [and] in their private relationships with God.”<sup>307</sup> Thus, the individual human is simultaneously removed as the sole object of election (and rejection) and resituated relative to Jesus Christ, the subject and object of election. Moreover, beginning with Jesus Christ and then proceeding to humanity is, for Barth, irreversible when he argues that,

The doctrine of election is rightly grounded when in respect of elected man as well as the electing God it does not deal with a generality or abstraction in God or man, but with the particularity and concretion of the true God and true man. It is rightly grounded when only from that starting-point it goes on to perceive and to understand whatever there is of consequence about God or man in general; from that starting-point, and not *vice versa*.<sup>308</sup>

This is in stark contrast to the traditional doctrine of election, which postulates a *decretum absolutum*, i.e., God’s hidden election of some humans to salvation and the rejection of the remainder to perdition. McDonald summarizes that, “On this understanding, Jesus Christ is seen as the chosen means to bring about the ends of an impersonal absolute decree; he is the catalyst for the inexorable unfolding in time of an unfathomable pre-temporal decision in which the individual destinies of every member of the human race have been arbitrarily determined.”<sup>309</sup> This is why Barth grounds his doctrine of election in Jesus Christ alone, even though Jesus Christ is not alone when he declares that,

If we would know who God is, and what is the meaning and purpose of His election, and in what respect He is the electing God, then we must look away from all others, and excluding all side-glances or secondary thoughts, we must look only upon and to the name of Jesus Christ, and the existence and history of the

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<sup>307</sup> CD II/2, 43.

<sup>308</sup> CD II/2, 51.

<sup>309</sup> McDonald, *Re-imaging*, 43.

people of God enclosed within Him. We must look only upon the divine mystery of this name and this history, of this Head and this body.<sup>310</sup>

Jesus Christ, however, does not eclipse those individuals elected in him but

establishes their individuality precisely as those elected by and in him. For Barth,

It is the name of Jesus Christ [that], according to the divine self-revelation, forms the focus at which the two decisive beams of the truth forced upon us converge and unite: on the one hand the electing God and on the other elected man. It is to this name, then, that all Christian teaching of this truth must look, from this name that it must derive, and to this name that it must strive. Like all Christian teaching it must always testify to this name.<sup>311</sup>

Thus, Barth's doctrine of election is against two opposite, yet equally perilous,

attempts to define the God who elects (and rejects) and those elected (or rejected) by

him. Greggs remarks that,

In articulating his doctrine of election, Barth is prepared to depart from the tradition precisely because the Bible responds to human questions about who and what God is by directing humanity to Jesus Christ, and in Christ one sees God's movement towards His people. In seeing Jesus Christ, one sees God, and in Jesus Christ one has to do with the electing God. Thus, to know who the electing God is we need to look to Jesus Christ and the people of God enclosed with Him; and to know what it is to be elected by God, one needs to look only to Jesus and those who are enclosed in Him.<sup>312</sup>

Barth's doctrine of election, therefore, does not solely concern Jesus Christ's self-witness as it also emphasises the communal-individual witness to the election and rejection of Jesus Christ. Daniel Gibson remarks that, "By placing Christology and humanity in proper relation to each other, Barth's doctrine of election begins with Jesus Christ as both the electing God and the elected man; then moves to see the one community of God (Israel and the church) as a witness to the election of Christ;

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<sup>310</sup> CD II/2, 54.

<sup>311</sup> CD II/2, 59.

<sup>312</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 78.

and only then comes to treat of the election of the individual.”<sup>313</sup> This communal-individual witness is neither religious rhetoric devoid of evangelical truth, nor is it the mechanistic outworking of a “hidden decree” but is the concrete correspondence to and echo of the divine election of all humans in Jesus Christ regardless if one believes in him or not. In fact, according to Barth, the eternal election (and temporal rejection) of Jesus Christ also determines every event of world-occurrence, as

The secret of all life is the existence of the living God as the One who has created life and who sustains and governs it. The secret of everything that takes place in this world is the decision of God which eternally precedes it. All other events culminate in the history of salvation and take place necessarily for the sake of it. In this history God’s decision which precedes everything, and therefore the divine electing of man and man’s election by God, is made visible and becomes operative in time in the form of the Word of God proclaimed and received, in the form of the people of Israel and the Church, in the form of the calling, justification, sanctification and glorification of man, in the form of man’s faith and hope and love.<sup>314</sup>

The scope, sequence, and limitation of this chapter, however, is that of the election of Israel and the church, and because Barth includes Israel and the church (with all their respective individuals) in his mature doctrine of election the opportunity and responsibility to explicate the sublimation of the Christian religion (i.e., the church) as divine election, particularly in its covenantal relationship to Israel, is afforded. Thus, it is contended that only as one understands the church’s covenantal relationship with Israel (and *vice versa*), can a better understanding of Barth’s argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election be reached.

In *Church Dogmatics* II/2, §34 one finds Barth’s doctrine of the election of the community succeeding and determined by his Christocentric doctrine of election.

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<sup>313</sup> David Gibson, “The Day of God’s Mercy: Romans 9-11 in Barth’s Doctrine of Election,” in *Engaging With Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, eds. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 138.

<sup>314</sup> *CD* II/2, 185.

Furthermore, the location of Barth's doctrine of the elect community of God as Israel and the church is important as he situates it between the election of Jesus Christ (§33) and the election of the individual (§35). According to Katherine Sonderegger, "Election is a divine act that belongs first and most completely to Christ alone. It extends to the people chosen in Christ as his body, and then, only then, to the individual members of Israel and the Church."<sup>315</sup> Thus, Jesus Christ is never without his community as his election determines the covenantal union between him and his elect community (i.e., Israel and the church), which is inhabited by its individual members (i.e., Jews and Christians). Finally, in order to appreciate fully Barth's argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion in its elected-covenantal relationship with Israel, one must remember Barth places his doctrine of the election of the community within his doctrine of God. R. Kendall Soulen contends that,

At one level, Barth's account of the one elect community is deeply traditional (indeed, far more traditional than is commonly recognized), inasmuch as Barth conceives of the relation of Israel and Church as a temporal sequence. At a more architectonic level, however, Barth's treatment of the elect community is profoundly revisionary, *since it makes God's election of Israel [and the church] constitutive of the doctrine of God as such*, albeit in a christologically mediated way.<sup>316</sup>

Barth's doctrine of the election of Israel and the church is, moreover, not only innovative but also infamous for, as Soulen remarks,

Few features of Barth's theology are as fraught with promise and peril as his doctrine of Israel. Rightly credited with almost singlehandedly recovering Israel's election as a central theme for Christian theology, Barth is often chastised for reiterating and even exacerbating some of the most troubling features of Christian polemic against the Jews.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Israel"* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 84.

<sup>316</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, "Karl Barth and Future of the God of Israel," *Pro Ecclesia* IV/4 (1997): 419. Author's emphasis.

<sup>317</sup> Soulen, "Karl Barth," 413.

While Kendall is correct regarding the controversial aspects of Barth's doctrine of Israel, he misses a very important aspect – Israel cannot be understood apart from the church and, ultimately, apart from Jesus Christ, the electing God and elected human. Thus, Lindsay is correct to state that, “There is, in Barth's dogmatics, no doctrine of Israel in and of itself. Rather, he insists that the question of Israel is to be seen in the context of broader themes such as election[.]”<sup>318</sup>

Turning now to §34.1 (“Israel and the Church”) Barth begins by pointing to the elect community's mediatorial function. The act of mediation is vital for Israel and the church as they “mediate” the election (and rejection) of Jesus Christ not only to their respective members but also to those outside their confines in the act of witness. According to Barth, Israel and the church collectively “*mediate*, that is, in so far as it is the middle point between the election of Jesus Christ and (included in this) the election of those who have believed, and do and will believe, in Him. It is *mediating* in so far as the relation between the election of Jesus Christ and that of all believers (and *vice versa*) is mediated and conditioned.”<sup>319</sup> Barth further argues how the community of God “has been chosen out of the world for the very purpose of performing for the world the service which it most needs and which consists in simply giving it the testimony of Jesus Christ and summoning it to faith in Him. It has forgotten and forfeited its election if it is found existing for itself only and omitting this service, if it is no longer really mediating.”<sup>320</sup> Barth does not argue that Israel and/or the church replace or even parallel the unique mediation of Jesus Christ but rather, in their two-fold mediation to themselves and those outside their walls,

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<sup>318</sup> Lindsay, *Barth, Israel*, xix.

<sup>319</sup> *CD II/2*, 196. Author's emphasis.

<sup>320</sup> *CD II/2*, 197-198.

they witness to the one and only mediator Jesus Christ. Barth argues that the twofold community of God “mirrors in its mediate and mediating character the existence of the one Mediator, Jesus Christ, Himself. In its particularity over against the world it reflects the freedom of the electing God, just as in its service to the world [...] it reflects His love.”<sup>321</sup> Thus, for Barth, the community of God exists because it is elected in the eternal election of Jesus Christ, which is an *electio continua* as evidenced in the community’s continual witness to Jesus Christ. Mangina states that,

This Christological point of reference needs to be kept constantly in view when considering Barth’s thinking about Israel/the church. On the one hand, it points to a certain relativizing of the community. The community is not an end in itself. It exists solely in order to bear witness to the world. On the other hand, God clearly wills to bring people to faith in Christ only through the mediation of the community, and therefore the latter has an extraordinarily dignified role to play in the divine drama.<sup>322</sup>

After establishing the mediating witness of Israel and the church, Barth turns to discuss their respective forms. Because the one community of God is determined by the election and rejection of Jesus Christ, his double predestination applies to the two forms of his community. Mangina remarks that, “God’s election takes up space in the world through the existence of these peoples. Or should we say, this people: in a decisive stroke, Barth construes Israel and the church as but two forms of a single community, centred in Jesus Christ.”<sup>323</sup> Barth further argues that, “If the election of the community is included in the election of Jesus Christ, if in and with Jesus Christ it is the object of this primal act of the free love of God, then we must inevitably expect that in its election too we will encounter this twofold (and in its twofoldness

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<sup>321</sup> CD II/2, 197.

<sup>322</sup> Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 74.

<sup>323</sup> Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 74.

single) direction of the eternal will of God.”<sup>324</sup> However, Barth does not divide Israel and church but distinguishes their two forms as the one community, which is unified and ordered by its Christological determination. Sonderegger comments that,

In Christ, the Object and Subject of election, the community is appointed and determined as the “representation” of Christ in the world. That community is one, as Christ is one; but it is determined in two forms, as Christ is of two natures [...] This one elected community in its two forms conforms to God’s intention: in the foundation of election, God willed to be with the creature, to establish fellowship with humanity through a community of Jew and Gentile. But it is an ordered community: the Jew precedes and has precedence over the Gentile.<sup>325</sup>

Beginning with Israel, Barth argues how its form corresponds to the judgment of God upon sinful humanity as revealed in the crucifixion (i.e., rejection) of Jesus Christ. He states that, “Jesus Christ is the crucified Messiah of Israel. As such He is the authentic witness of the judgment that God takes upon Himself by choosing fellowship with man. As such He is the original hearer of the divine promise. As such He is the suffering inaugurator of the passing of the first form of the community.”<sup>326</sup> Israel’s form is determined by its (negative) relationship to Jesus Christ, and the reason Israel is “rejected” by God is because it rejected its Messiah by handing him over to the Gentiles to be crucified. According to Wesley Hill, “Israel’s rejection of Jesus Christ, seen in the historical reality of the Jewish people’s turning from [the] gospel, reveals their vocation to bear witness to the ‘reprobation’ of Jesus Christ.”<sup>327</sup> However, Israel’s form of rejection is only a form because Jesus Christ, who is its rejected Messiah, determines its content. This does not excuse or condone

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<sup>324</sup> CD II/2, 197.

<sup>325</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 111.

<sup>326</sup> CD II/2, 198.

<sup>327</sup> Wesley Hill, “The Church as Israel and Israel as the Church: An Examination of Karl Barth’s Exegesis of Romans 9:1-5 in *The Epistle to the Romans* and *Church Dogmatics 2/2*,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6/1 (2012): 150.



Israel's rejection of its Messiah but reveals its election to be the rejected form of the community of God. Barth states that, "Israel is the people of the Jews which resists its divine election. It is the community of God in so far as this community has to exhibit also the unwillingness, incapacity and unworthiness of man with respect to the love of God directed to him."<sup>328</sup> Therefore, Barth upholds the divine determination of Israel as the rejected form of the community by affirming its undeniable guilt in handing over its Messiah to be crucified but also and ultimately understands Israel's guilt and rejection as pre-emptively negated in the eternal election of Jesus Christ. Soulen argues that,

Barth makes any thought of God's [final] rejection of Israel conceptually incoherent on the basis of his christological reconstruction of double predestination. According to Barth, God's inevitable rejection of sinful humanity falls exclusively upon Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, in whom it is overcome on behalf of all. Israel's election is "irrevocable" because it rests on God's election of humanity in Christ, in whom the sinner's rejection of God is "always already" outstripped and overcome by God's righteous mercy.<sup>329</sup>

The church, as the second form of the community of God, is determined by the election of Jesus Christ not only because it historically succeeds Israel but also because it is the final form of the community. Just as Israel corresponds to the divine judgment on Jesus Christ, so the church corresponds to the divine mercy of Jesus Christ for, as Barth argues, "Jesus Christ is also the risen Lord of the Church. As such He is the authentic witness of the mercy in which God in choosing man for fellowship with Himself turns towards him His own glory. He is as such the original pattern of the believer. He is as such the triumphant inaugurator of the gracious coming of the new form of man."<sup>330</sup> For Barth, however, the church is not a new

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<sup>328</sup> *CD* II/2, 198.

<sup>329</sup> Soulen, "Karl Barth," 421.

religion worshipping a different God than the one Israel worships (albeit in its current form as Judaism), as it existed *in utero* in Old Testament Israel until the revelation of Jesus Christ. According to Sonderegger, “Like Israel, the Church is an elected community; within Israel from its beginning, the Church has lived a hidden existence. The Church foreshadows the election of grace within the election of judgment of the people Israel.”<sup>331</sup> At this point the concept of covenant in Barth’s doctrine of the divine election of the Christian religion in §17.3 re-emerges in his doctrine of the election of the community. The relationship between Israel and the church is covenantal for they are united into the one community of God as revealed in Jesus Christ as the electing God and the rejected human for, according to Moseley, “only from the history of the covenant made with Israel can the reality of the Christian religion be deduced.”<sup>332</sup> Hence, for Barth, Israel and the church “are the two forms of the elected community, the two poles between which its history moves (in a unilateral direction, from here to there), but in such a way that the bow of the one covenant arches over the whole.”<sup>333</sup> As the twofold representation of and witness to the election and rejection of Jesus Christ, Israel and the church are indissolubly bound in a covenantal relationship wherein they witness to the divine judgment and divine mercy respectively. Barth contends that the

bow of the covenant over the two is not a neutral area and observation point between them but the history which takes place between Israel and the Church. The way of this history is, however, the way of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It leads from Israel *to* the Church. Only in this movement, i.e., in practice only from

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<sup>330</sup> CD II/2, 198.

<sup>331</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 110.

<sup>332</sup> Moseley, *Nations and Nationalism*, 130.

<sup>333</sup> CD II/2, 200.

the standpoint of the Church, can it be perceived, described and understood as the living way of the one elect community of God.<sup>334</sup>

This means Barth's theology of Israel and the church, in their two forms of witness, must be interpreted together, for to attempt to separate them into absolutely distinct religions is only possible (but ultimately impossible) by unbelief. Barth states that, "Only unbelief [*Unglaube*] with regard to Jesus Christ can try to separate here what God has joined together."<sup>335</sup> Because of the impossibility of separating absolutely Israel and the church, Barth can argue how Israel's teleology is only found in its inevitable incorporation into the church. In the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Mangina argues that, for Barth,

Israel no longer has a future – or rather, its future is its destiny of being taken up into the Church's witness, the Church called from among Jews and Gentiles. Jews who do not accept the gospel, and who persist in treating Judaism as a way of pleasing God, are tragically mistaken. Yet their unbelief certainly does not invalidate their election.<sup>336</sup>

Barth's understanding of Israel's eventual incorporation into the church is, however, not only its dissolution, which is why Mangina is correct and incorrect in his understanding of the incorporation of Israel when he states that the "material Jewish existence has no positive significance in Barth's thought. The reason for this is clear: he thinks of the election of Israel as completely dissolved (*aufgehoben*) in the election of Jesus Christ."<sup>337</sup> Mangina is correct insofar as he correctly understands Israel's election as solely determined by Jesus Christ but is incorrect that this is solely the dissolution of Israel. This is because Mangina fails to uphold the

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<sup>334</sup> CD II/2, 200. Author's emphasis.

<sup>335</sup> CD II/2, 201; KD II/2, 221. Because religion is *Unglaube* (i.e., faithlessness; cf. §17.2), it manifests in one's desire to separate two or more religions with the goal of justifying one religion over the other(s) (e.g., Christianity contra Judaism or *vice versa*).

<sup>336</sup> Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 80.

<sup>337</sup> Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 81.

dialectical movement of sublimation as dissolving *and* purifying. Hence, Soulen is more correct when he argues that, for Barth, “Christ brings Israel’s career as a natural people to an end. Thereafter Israel’s sole legitimate destiny is to be *taken up* into the church, the new and true Israel, where the significance of its identity as a carnal people is permanently transcended.”<sup>338</sup> As a point of theological continuity, then, it is contended that the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election cannot be understood apart from Israel, even in its current manifestation as Judaism, for the Christian religion will only and finally be the true religion when Israel comes to faith in its Messiah, who is also the Lord of the church.

Barth continues his argument for the election of the community as Israel and the church, particularly its twofold witness to the divine judgment and to the divine mercy as revealed in the election and rejection of Jesus Christ, in §34.2 (“The Judgment and Mercy of God”). According to Barth, the community of God

is elected to serve the presentation (the self-presentation) of Jesus Christ and the act of God which took place in Him—as a testimony and summons to the whole world. The whole community of God—Israel and the Church—is elected for this as surely as it is elected in Jesus Christ. The whole community exists in this service as surely as Jesus Christ founds and constitutes it in both its forms, as surely as He is its unity and in its midst. Wherever the community is living, there—in the power and commission of Him who is in its midst—it will at all events exist in the service of this presentation, the presentation of the judgment and mercy of God.<sup>339</sup>

Beginning with Israel, Barth points to its unique history, including its current religious expression as Judaism, in which Israel testifies to the rejection of Jesus Christ. Barth states that, “The specific service for which Israel is determined within the whole of the elected community is to reflect the judgment from which God has rescued man which He wills to endure Himself in the person of Jesus of

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<sup>338</sup> Soulen, “Karl Barth,” 423. Emphasis mine.

<sup>339</sup> *CD* II/2, 205-206.

Nazareth.”<sup>340</sup> The rejection of Israel, however, is not eternal because it rejected its Messiah; rather the rejection of Israel is the witness of its election, which testifies to God’s temporal rejection of and judgment upon all sinful humanity and, therefore, his eternal election of and mercy for all humanity in Jesus Christ. David Gibson remarks that,

The issue for Barth is not whether Israel, or individuals from Israel, will be saved; the matter at hand is the divine calling given to Israel to be the form of the community that resists its election and so testifies to God’s judgment [....] Israel and the church are elect for specific forms of service. For Barth this means that the election of Israel is never in doubt and it is impossible for the salvific election of any Jew to be undone. This is ultimately because of the election of Jesus Christ.<sup>341</sup>

Israel’s witness to the divine judgment, moreover, does not terminate in itself but serves the church’s witness to the divine mercy and only finds its purpose therein.

Barth argues that,

If in faith in Jesus Christ Israel is obedient to its election, if it is given to it to come to the Church and rise to life [*aufleben*] again in it, to attain in it the goal of its determination, the special contribution which it will make within the whole of the community to the work of the community will be this. It will express the awareness of the human basis of the divine suffering and therefore the recognition of man’s incapacity, unwillingness and unworthiness with regard to the divine mercy purposed in Jesus Christ; the recognition of the justice of the judgment passed on man in the suffering of Jesus Christ. *The Church needs this contribution.*<sup>342</sup>

The church needs Israel’s contribution because without the divine judgment the divine mercy has no meaning and *vice versa*. Lindsay states that, “the Church needs the witness of the Synagogue as the indispensable root from which it has sprung and in which it must remain if it is to be complete.”<sup>343</sup> However, to avoid a nominalist

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<sup>340</sup> CD II/2, 206.

<sup>341</sup> Gibson, “Romans 9-11,” 144.

<sup>342</sup> CD II/2, 206; KD II/2, 227. Emphasis mine.

understanding of the rejection of Israel and its witness to the divine judgment one must remember that, for Barth, God's rejection of Israel is a serious and concrete reality. The faithlessness of Israel, as expressed in Judaism, has no innate hope of becoming faithfulness, for even though God has eternally elected Israel, for Soulen, "this does not change the fact that the Synagogue's existence is in principle empty and powerless, erected as it is upon the disobedience to God."<sup>344</sup> Only when the church understands the severity of the divine judgment upon the faithlessness of Israel can it understand the divine mercy shown to it (and Israel).

Furthermore, for Barth, the disobedience of Israel not only evidences its religious expression of Judaism as one of the many non-sublimated religions but also informs the church that it must see itself in solidarity with Judaism as faithless to God in its own peculiar religiosity as the Christian religion. This stems from Barth's understanding of Israel's witness to the divine judgment for rejecting its Messiah as a representational microcosm of humanity's collective rejection of the God of Jesus Christ. Barth argues that Israel

is an adequate demonstration of the depths of human guilt and need and therefore of the inconceivable greatness of God's love in the event in which God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The Jews of the ghetto give this demonstration involuntarily, joylessly and ingloriously, but they do give it. They have nothing to attest to the world but the shadow of the cross of Jesus Christ that falls upon them. But they, too, do actually and necessarily attest Jesus Christ Himself.<sup>345</sup>

Because the church is included in the divine judgment on Israel it cannot boast of being the true religion in abstraction from or in antithesis to Israel but only as the final form of what the community of God will be. David Demson argues that,

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<sup>343</sup> Lindsay, *Barth, Israel*, 109.

<sup>344</sup> Soulen, "Karl Barth," 425.

<sup>345</sup> *CD II/2*, 209.

The gospel has not been annulled or suspended by Israel's disobedience. In its own way, Israel's disobedience confirms the gospel. When we see the synagogue excluded by the [Church] because of its refusal of the gospel, we are to despair of neither the gospel nor this people. In Israel, where the gospel originated and is at home, the gospel has always brought exclusion – not for the sake of exclusion but for the sake of inclusion. Israel must die with the Christ promised to it, in order to live with Christ.<sup>346</sup>

The covenantal solidarity of Israel and the church is grounded upon and determined by the election and rejection of Jesus Christ because Barth refuses to construct his doctrine of the election of the community from general history (e.g., Fall of Jerusalem; Jewish Diaspora; Holocaust). Instead he turns to Jesus Christ alone in and from whom he sees Israel as the form of the community which points to the divine judgment as overcome by the divine mercy. Sonderegger argues that, "Israel unites its disparate parts in a single divine and historical purpose, to 'serve the representation of the divine judgment' that Christ alone assumes."<sup>347</sup>

Israel's final aspect, as the form of the community that witnesses to the divine judgment, regards its inevitable incorporation into the church. For Barth, the goal of Israel's election is to rise to life in the church, which witnesses to the divine mercy. According to Barth, whenever Israel becomes obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ it will "at once mean that its special witness about God's judgment [will] become the undertone to the Church's witness about God's mercy, and that sustained, covered and (in the best sense of the word) softened by the voice of the Church it [will] be taken up [*aufgenommen*] into the praise of the elected community."<sup>348</sup> This statement by Barth is seemingly incredulous given the historical and contemporary

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<sup>346</sup> David Demson, "Israel as the Paradigm of Divine Judgment: An Examination of a Theme in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26/4 (1989): 614.

<sup>347</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 83.

<sup>348</sup> *CD* II/2, 208; *KD* II/2, 229.

phenomenon of Judaism not becoming incorporated into Christianity. However, for Barth, simply because the empirical phenomenon asserts a different reality that stands in utter contradiction to the reality that he contends for does not mean it is true. Because Barth bases the election of the community upon the election and rejection of Jesus Christ he believes the possibility of Israel's eternal rejection of its Messiah is an impossible possibility. According to Barth, Israel currently

acts as if it had still another special determination and future beside and outwith the Church. It acts as if it could realise its true determination beside and outwith the Church. And in so doing it creates a schism, a gulf, in the midst of the community of God. But Israel's unbelief [*Unglaube*] cannot in any way alter the fact that objectively, and effectively, even in this senseless attitude beside and outwith the Church, it is the people of its arrived and crucified Messiah, and therefore the people of the secret (concealed from it as yet) Lord of the Church.<sup>349</sup>

Barth does not underestimate Israel's past, present, and (limited) future faithlessness but establishes it in the fact that Jesus Christ has been rejected for all humans; therefore, Israel's rejection of its Messiah has already been rejected thereby limiting Israel to only one future – to “rise to life” in the life of the church. As Israel's goal, the church is the final form of the community of God, which testifies to the divine mercy as revealed in Jesus Christ. The covenant between Israel and the church, determined by the eternal election of Jesus Christ, is actualised in history with the purpose of Israel providing the church (and by extension all humanity) with a witness to the divine judgment in its own peculiar history. Israel is the preparatory means by which the church knows God rejected the rejection of Israel in Jesus Christ and thereby shows mercy to it, and even all humanity. Barth declares that,

The service for which the Church as the perfect form of the one elected community is determined, whether Israel obeys its election or not, consists always in the fact that it is the reflection of the mercy in which God turns His glory to man. The community in the form of the Church is the community of the risen

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<sup>349</sup> *CD* II/2, 208; *KD* II/2, 230.



Lord Jesus Christ. As the Church is elected, called and gathered from among Jews and Gentiles, the task laid upon it consists in the proclamation of its knowledge of the divine meaning of the judgment that has overtaken man in the death of Jesus, in witness to the good-will, readiness and honour of God with respect to man accepted and received by Him in Jesus Christ.<sup>350</sup>

Consequently, the church can never dispense with Israel as it continually reminds the church why the divine mercy can only be understood relative to the divine judgment, which serves it. According to Barth, the divine judgment attested by Israel relates asymmetrically to the divine mercy as attested by the church. Barth states that, “In distinction from that of Israel the service of the Church is not a specific service beside which there might yet be another in the community of God. On the contrary, it includes in itself the particular service of Israel as a necessary auxiliary service. It takes it up [*Er nimmt ihn auf*], using and applying it as a contribution.”<sup>351</sup> This asymmetrical relation is revealed in the divine judgment borne by Jesus Christ in whom God shows mercy to all humanity. Angus Paddison remarks that, “The ‘No’ of the disbelieving synagogue is cast asymmetrically to the ‘Yes’ of mercy victoriously proclaimed by God’s Son, whose death and resurrection manifests the victory of God’s ‘Yes’ over humanity’s ‘No.’”<sup>352</sup>

At this juncture one may wonder why, for Barth, God chooses to judge Israel but is merciful to the church, for he strongly states that, “Israel in itself and as such can have only the involuntary share in the service of God’s community described above. Israel in itself and as such lives actually—to its hurt—by the fact that it cannot renounce this share in the life of the community, that it *must* serve as a witness to the

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<sup>350</sup> CD II/2, 210.

<sup>351</sup> CD II/2, 210; KD II/2, 232.

<sup>352</sup> Angus Paddison, “Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis of Romans 9-11 in the Light of Jewish-Christian Understanding,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28/4 (2006): 475.

divine judgment.”<sup>353</sup> The solution to this seemingly capricious and arbitrary act of God is that Israel, as the witness to divine judgment, does not exist independently of the church (and *vice versa*) but serves the church’s proclamation of the divine mercy. Demson argues that, for Barth, “God endures ‘vessels of wrath’ and even wills their service as a witness to God’s judgment, because God wills to refashion them into ‘vessels of mercy.’ The existence of the church comprised of Jews and gentiles is proof of this.”<sup>354</sup> Because of the divine sovereignty over and for humanity as revealed in Jesus Christ, Barth avoids construing God as a whimsical deity but rather argues how the divine judgment on Israel and divine mercy towards the church is the historical ordering and unfolding of the one community of God founded upon and determined by the eternal election of Jesus Christ. Paddison argues that, “God’s election works itself out by means of mercy and judgment—both alongside one another for the purpose of the one community. It is not for humanity to object to God’s electing purposes, but to perceive that some speak ‘No’ to God for the sake of those who say ‘Yes.’”<sup>355</sup> Another issue is how Barth’s interpretation of the church, as the goal and final form of the community of God, could also seem arbitrary. One could conclude that, for Barth, God elects the church because he knows Israel will remain perpetually obdurate after rejecting its Messiah. This, however, is incorrect, as Barth understands the church to be the final and united community of Jews and Gentiles. Barth declares that,

All that is implied in the nature and will of the electing God, all that God has given and gives and will give, all that is in any circumstance to be expected from Him, is what the community of God reveals in its final form as the Church. It

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<sup>353</sup> CD II/2, 210. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>354</sup> Demson, “Israel as the Paradigm of Divine Judgment,” 615.

<sup>355</sup> Paddison, “Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis,” 475.

reveals that the primal, basic decision of God with regard to man is His mercy, the engagement of His heart, and therefore His most intimate and intensive involvement in the latter's existence and condition. It reveals that even God's judgment is sustained and surrounded by God's mercy, even His severity by His kindness, even His wrath by His love.<sup>356</sup>

The election of the church is, thus, not only evident in its current existence as the true religion (i.e., Christian religion), but also in its pre-existent, embryonic, and anticipatory mode within Israel, having emerged out of Israel in the revelation of Jesus Christ. According to Paddison, "There has always been the pre-existent church within Israel, and the obstinacy of the synagogue confirms, rather than disproves, both the continuing efficacy of God's election and the veracity of Scripture."<sup>357</sup> Because the eternal covenant in the election of Jesus Christ unites Israel and the church, one must acknowledge that an aspect of the election of the church is its participation in the enigmatic history of Israel. Barth states that, "The Church is the bearer of God's positive message to the world in which the negative is—necessarily, but still only subordinately—included [... and the] Church form of the community stands in the same relation to its Israelite form as the resurrection of Jesus to His crucifixion, as God's mercy to God's judgment."<sup>358</sup>

Because God in Jesus Christ elects the church to be the final form of his community Barth believes the church pre-existed within Israel, and yet still requires Israel to witness to divine judgment in order to understand its current experience of and responsibility to witness to the divine mercy. Using the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ as an analogy of the divine judgment and divine mercy, Barth states that,

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<sup>356</sup> *CD II/2*, 211.

<sup>357</sup> Paddison, "Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis," 474.

<sup>358</sup> *CD II/2*, 211.

Strictly speaking, the pre-existent life of the Church in Israel consists only in the light which, without changing its character, is provisionally cast on the history of Israel by this one man, who is Israel's future and goal, making visible within this history a certain individual, fragmentary, contradictory and transitory prefigurations of the form of the community which will be revealed in and with the appearance, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>359</sup>

For Barth, the church's pre-existent witness in Israel points forward to the day when all human faithlessness will be abrogated and supplanted by true faithfulness.

According to Barth,

The pre-existent life of the Church in Israel consists in the fact that again and again in its history there is revealed a contradiction against the sin of man, an illumination and clarification of the divine judgment, an obedience and faith which are disclosed and validated in their reality, not indeed by the course and character of this history in itself and as such, but by its future and goal in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and the existence of His Church. The pre-existent life of the Church in Israel consists, then, in what the fulfillment shows to be the real prevision and prophecy of the Church itself occurring in and with the existence of these elect in and from Israel and constituting the purpose of their special election.<sup>360</sup>

This is why the church's witnesses to itself, Israel, and the world is the final form of the community of God, when it points not to itself but always to Jesus Christ upon whom the judgment of God falls and in whom the mercy of God is given. Mangina rightly contends that, "Neither community *deserves* the divine love shown to it. Both live by God's mercy alone. But each does so in the shape of its particular, peculiar history in the world, the Jews in the shadow-existence occasioned by their rejection of the Messiah, the church in its imperfect yet grace-sustained life in Christ."<sup>361</sup>

In the next subsection of §34.3 ("The Promise of God Heard and Believed") Barth builds upon his understanding of Israel's witness to the divine judgment and the church's witness to the divine mercy with the further aspect that Israel's

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<sup>359</sup> CD II/2, 213.

<sup>360</sup> CD II/2, 213.

<sup>361</sup> Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 75. Author's emphasis.

form/witness is characterized by only hearing the Word of God, whereas the church's form/witness is evident in hearing and believing in the Word of God. Mangina remarks that, "As the community that has heard God's Word and disobeyed it, thereby earning God's condemnation, Israel witnesses to the divine No; as the community called both to hear and obey, the church witnesses to the divine Yes."<sup>362</sup> Beginning again with the election of Jesus Christ, Barth declares that,

The purpose of the election of this One is God's will that in and through this One man should come to hear His self-witness as the promise, pledge and assurance which is valid for his own life too, and that in faith he should relate to himself what is spoken to him in the person of this One, accepting its truth and actuality for himself, relying on it, living by the fact that it is said to him.<sup>363</sup>

Barth turns first to Israel as the form of the community that only hears the gospel but refuses to believe in it, because Israel should recognize and believe in Jesus of Nazareth her Messiah but historically and currently refuses to. Barth states that,

If Israel becomes obedient to its election by rising to life in the Church, its special contribution to the fulfillment of the mission of the community within the totality will be again and again to make room for pure readiness to accept the Word spoken by God, for humble attention to the fact that it is spoken to man, for close attention to what is said to him—in distinction from and contrast to all that man can say and would like to say to himself. *The Church needs this contribution.*<sup>364</sup>

One of the ethical implications of the eventual incorporation of Israel into the church is the impossibility of it being anti-Semitic. According to Barth, "A Church that becomes antisemitic or even only a-semitic sooner or later suffers the loss of its faith by losing the object of it [...] The Church has every reason to see that Israel's special service in the community is not interrupted but faithfully continued."<sup>365</sup> For

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<sup>362</sup> Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 75.

<sup>363</sup> *CD II/2*, 233.

<sup>364</sup> *CD II/2*, 233-234. Emphasis mine.

<sup>365</sup> *CD II/2*, 234.

Barth, Judaism is not a lesser, equal, or greater evolved monotheistic religion relative to Christianity; rather, Judaism is bound in covenant to Christianity, serving its sublimation by being a constant and microcosmic reminder of God's rejection of all religions and their adherents. This is not anti-*Semitism* but anti-*Judaism* as, according to Sonderegger, "Barth's anti-Judaism 'discovers' Judaism within dogmatics because it defines the people of Israel as the witness to creaturely sin and as the living reminder of the Messiah who will graciously reconcile the creature apart from merit."<sup>366</sup> The Christian religion, therefore, must never take a stance of superiority towards Judaism or allow its required anti-Judaism to degenerate into anti-Semitism, as the Christian religion is to be simultaneously against the futility of Judaism's attempt to be another true religion alongside Christianity and yet also desirous to see all Jews rise to life in the church through faith in Jesus Christ. Demson argues that, "Enmity toward Jews – since it misunderstands their witness to the freedom of God's mercy – is the paradigmatic disobedience of gentiles toward the gospel. The gentile who is against Jews is the paradigmatically disobedient gentile."<sup>367</sup> It is, therefore, impossible to interpret Barth's theology of Israel as anti-Semitic, even though it is necessary to understand him as theologically against Judaism because, for him, only the Christian religion is the true religion. Gorringer remarks that, in Barth's theology of Israel,

we find the strongest statements affirming Israel's eternal election, in the face of the basic lie of anti-Semitism, that because it was the Jews who crucified Christ they were rejected and destined for shame and punishment. Barth will have none of this. By virtue of their election it is impossible to exterminate Israel, it is impossible to be anti-Semitic, [and] we have to recognize that the Church always needs Israel.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 7-8.

<sup>367</sup> Demson, "Israel as the Paradigm of Divine Judgment," 620.

Barth believes a Jew who remains a practitioner Judaism only hears the Word of God, for if she did hear and believe she would rise to life in the church. Not surprisingly, Barth's criticism of Judaism attracts a great amount of criticism, particularly in this post-Holocaust world in which a critique of any aspect of Jewish culture can easily be (mis)construed as anti-Semitic. Sonderegger testifies to this when she states that, "Barth's dogmatic interpretation of Judaism will not find ready acceptance in modern theological circles, nor will it be free from offense."<sup>369</sup> Even though Barth critiques Judaism's refusal to hear and believe the gospel, which manifests in its faithlessness, it has a positive contribution to the sublimation of the Christian religion as divinely elected. Sonderegger remarks how Barth's "Christian anti-Judaism does not remain one-sided; it honors and praises Judaism as Christianity's origin, but rebukes Jewish disbelief."<sup>370</sup> Israel's task, then, is to witness to the divine judgment by only hearing the gospel, and yet it is also determined to believe eventually the message it hears. Barth states that, "God's aim and purpose with Israel undoubtedly consists, then, in the fact that it takes up and discharges [*antrete und versehe*] this special service, and therefore—*being merged in the Church*—attests the unity of the community in its differentiation. It consists, then, in the fact that it passes from hearing to believing."<sup>371</sup> However, for Israel to pass from hearing to believing it must first experience divine rejection as a consequence of its faithlessness; and yet in spite its faithlessness, God remains faithful to the

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<sup>368</sup> Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 151.

<sup>369</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 4.

<sup>370</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 6.

<sup>371</sup> *CD II/2*, 235; *KD II/2*, 258. Emphasis mine.

covenant he decreed and fulfilled for Israel in the election of Jesus Christ. Barth declares that,

Israel cannot by any breach of the covenant annul the covenant of mercy which God has established between himself and man. It cannot by its own unfaithfulness [*Untreue*] turn God's faithfulness [*Treue*] into its opposite. It cannot nullify the eternal benefit offered to it in God's Word; its credibility, its consolation, its summons or its hope. Even with regard to stubborn Israel the promise remains what it is, God's irrevocable and irrefutable self-witness to which man can, to his hurt, refuse faith, but which he cannot do anything by any unbelief [*Unglauben*] change into a message of woe.<sup>372</sup>

Unlike Israel, the church is comprised of those who hear and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ and is thereby deemed the "perfect" form of the community. As hearing but not believing in Jesus Christ characterizes Israel's form, so hearing and believing in Jesus Christ characterizes the church's form. Barth argues that,

In the perfect form of the one elected community of God the service of the Church consists, quite irrespective of Israel's attitude, in the fact that it secures attention for the promise heard by putting faith in it. The Church is in existence wherever the promise finds faith—among both Jews and Gentiles—by creating faith for itself. Faith means putting one's confidence in God's mercy as it is attested to man—both Jew and Gentile—by God Himself in His promise.<sup>373</sup>

Faith proves how the church is the perfect form of the community because, in contrast to Israel, the church does not simply hear the voice of Jesus Christ but wholly commits to confess and proclaim that he is the risen Lord of the church because he was the crucified Messiah of Israel. Barth declares that the "service of the Church is that as it hears the promise it awakens to this faith, lives in this faith and attests this faith to the whole world as the temporal doing of God's good-will with man that prepares for its eternal fulfillment."<sup>374</sup> However, should one conclude that Barth attempts to separate Israel and the church on the basis of his criterion of

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<sup>372</sup> *CD* II/2, 237; *KD* II/2, 260.

<sup>373</sup> *CD* II/2, 237.

<sup>374</sup> *CD* II/2, 238.



faithfulness (or the lack thereof), they must remember that Israel's temporary faithlessness does not negate its role in making the church the perfect form of the community. Barth contends that, "Israel lives when it accomplishes this step, when its hearing rises to life as faith, when it itself rises to life in the Church as its crucified Messiah rises to life in His resurrection as the Lord of the Church. It has, therefore, a redemptive part in the service of the community, a redemptive part in its appointed task with regard to the world."<sup>375</sup> The redemptive service of Israel in, with, and for the church is not an unforeseen reaction by God to adopt and adapt faithless Israel for further use under the fulfilled covenant in the resurrection of Jesus Christ; rather, it is a demonstration of Israel's eternal election in spite of its temporal rejection of Jesus Christ. Here Barth again employs the notion of the pre-existence of the church in Israel when he states that, "The Church of faith in God's promise, as it pre-exists in Israel and ultimately arises from it, is the positive confirmation of its election. In Israel to believe means specifically to become obedient to the election of Israel, a voluntary doer of the word of promise given to Israel."<sup>376</sup> However, the totality of Israel has yet to rise to life in the church and, as Paddison contends, until all of Israel believes in Jesus Christ "it has a ministry of allowing in the Gentiles *and* acting as an instrument to stoke their own jealousy. Israel's hardening is therefore an outworking not of its rejected status, but of its elected status."<sup>377</sup> Therefore, regardless of how many Jews believe (or not) in Jesus Christ, their communal election as Israel plays a role in the election of the church as the final and perfect form of the community. For Barth, the church sees, in its pre-existence in Israel, fragmentary and sporadic events

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<sup>375</sup> CD II/2, 238.

<sup>376</sup> CD II/2, 239.

<sup>377</sup> Paddison, "Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis," 479. Author's emphasis.

in which Israel points forward to the final, perfect form of the community as demonstrated in the faith of the church. He argues that,

The reality of the pre-existent Church in Israel consists in the repeated occurrence in Israel's history of that hearing of God's Word which from the standpoint of the end and goal of that history in the person of Jesus can be understood only as faith, only as a prevision and prophecy of the proper and exact hearing of the Church—or not at all.<sup>378</sup>

It is at this point, and in order to understand better the church's relationship towards the Jews and so compel them to cease practising Judaism and rise to life in the church, one must venture into Barth's doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* §49.3 ("The Divine Ruling"). Here Barth points to the Jews' unique history as a witness to the general lordship of God over all world-occurrence. According to Barth, "it is not impossible to consider the history of the Jews, like that of the Bible, without coming to the conclusion that the world has a ruling King, and that Jesus of Nazareth is this King."<sup>379</sup> Barth, however, does not simply "read off" the history of the Jews and thereby conclude why a particular Jew named Jesus of Nazareth must be King over all creation. Instead Barth draws upon the self-revelation of Jesus Christ who is the elected and rejected Jew and interprets all other Jews in light of him. From the standpoint of Jesus Christ as elected and rejected Barth concludes that the Jews provide a negative testimony of those who were the people of God but, since the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE, are no longer. Barth declares that, "We maintain that within world history generally the Jews are a people in the distinctive way which in the last resort we can only describe as a negative. We maintain that it is only as a people of this kind that they have a

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<sup>378</sup> CD II/2, 239-240.

<sup>379</sup> CD III/3, 210.

history.”<sup>380</sup> Furthermore, because Barth interprets the Jews through the lens of Jesus Christ as elected and rejected, he believes they also have a positive aspect that corresponds to the resurrection of Christ. Barth remarks that,

Far from turning aside from His people, far from allowing it to fall, in the One who died for His people and for all men God not merely turned towards [Israel] but accepted solidarity with it. His appointment and constitution of Israel as the bearer of light and salvation to all nations are actualised in the death and revealed in the resurrection of the One who is the remnant of the Jewish remnant of Israel, and who definitely died and rose again on behalf of this remnant, indeed of Israel as a whole.<sup>381</sup>

Because Jesus Christ overcame his rejection in his resurrection, Israel is elected to participate in that event, yet remains faithless as evidenced in its continual practice of Judaism. For Barth,

The Jew, therefore, belongs to the elected people, but he also belongs to the people which is unfaithful to its election. It is for the sake of the election that this people, and the Jew himself, persists and lives, but it is also for the sake of its unfaithfulness [*Untreue*] that it persists and lives, that the Jews exist as they actually do exist, that they are not a people, that this is the form in which they have traversed world history since the year 70.<sup>382</sup>

Thus, the Jews play a positive role in the sublimation of the Christian religion because in the Jew the Christian sees her temporal rejection and eternal election, which further solidifies Barth’s argument for how the church is bound in covenant to Israel. Barth argues that, “What man is in the light of the divine election and calling, how he is an object of the free grace of God, what is his relation to it and in what capacity he is judged by it—it is this whole shadow of the history of the covenant and salvation and its fulfillment which the Jews embody and reveal.”<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> CD III/3, 216.

<sup>381</sup> CD III/3, 217.

<sup>382</sup> CD III/3, 219; *Kirchliche Dogmatik* III/3 (Zürich: EVZ, 1950), 248. Hereafter *KD* III/3.

<sup>383</sup> CD III/3, 219.

Barth ends this treatment of his doctrine of Israel by pointing to how and why the Jews (since 70 CE) have evoked such disdain from other nations. The first function of the Jews is to mirror to other humans that all, regardless of race, are evil. Barth states that, “The Jew as a Jew is neither better nor worse than other men. But in the Jew we have revealed and shown to us in a mirror who and what we all are, and how bad we all are.”<sup>384</sup> The particularities of the evil of humanity as mirrored by the Jews are further revealed as, according to Barth, “the primal revolt, the unbelief [*Unglaube*], the disobedience, in which we are all engaged. In this sense the Jew is the most human of all men. And that is why he is not pleasing to us. That is why we want him away. That is why we want to remove this alien element from our midst.”<sup>385</sup> The most obvious manifestation of humanity’s disdain for the Jews is that of anti-Semitism. According to Gorringer, “the irritation others feel at the marks of [the Jews’] election, [is because] they continue to exist without any of the usual securities, and that they persist when other peoples assimilate or disappear into history.”<sup>386</sup> However, for Barth, this is only one aspect of the providential role that the Jews play in their historical relations with the rest of humanity. Inasmuch as other cultures/nations would prefer the Jews to disappear through socio-political assimilation, God’s providential ordering of creation as grounded upon and determined by the eternal election of Jesus Christ allows the Jews to remain as a mirror for the rest of humanity. Barth concludes the first point by stating,

The divine providence has arranged it that the Jews should still be there, and continue to be there, and no anti-Semitism, however refined or crude, can ever alter the fact. Because they are the elect of God they have to be there openly and

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<sup>384</sup> *CD* III/3, 221.

<sup>385</sup> *CD* III/3, 222; *KD* III/3, 251.

<sup>386</sup> Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 195.

visibly. And because their election is a pattern of the election of all peoples, of the whole human race, this mirror cannot be taken away and must not be taken away. All men have to look in this mirror and see themselves as they really are, and confess that their cloaks are only cloaks, and that in reality they too are manifestly the enemies of God.<sup>387</sup>

The second and final point Barth makes regarding the function of the Jews relative to all other humans is their positive role in witnessing to the eternally electing grace of God in spite of their temporal rejection of Jesus Christ. Barth contends that, “in the actual existence of the Jews, in their strange being as a people which is not a people, we are positively confronted with the fact of God’s electing grace, with the fact of His mercy as the sole and mighty basis of human existence.”<sup>388</sup> Just as the Jews’ role of mirroring the sinfulness of humanity demonstrates a universal solidarity of all humans in sin, so too does their enduring election testify that God has chosen all humans in and through, but never apart from, his chosen people. Barth argues that,

What the history of the Jews tells us is that the divine election is the election of another. [The church’s] election can be only in and with this other. If the grace and mercy and long-suffering of God are to be to us, if we are to remain, to persist, to be preserved, we cannot possibly avoid this other, for the goodness of God can be to us only as it is first to him, and to us in and through him.<sup>389</sup>

Therefore, one sees in Barth’s doctrine of providence how Israel and the church are in covenantal union as co-witnesses to the election and rejection of Jesus Christ, meaning God’s sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election only occurs in relation to Judaism’s mirroring its faithlessness, but also and ultimately in confirming its preservation because of their eternal election.

The final subsection of Barth’s doctrine of the election of the community is §34.4 (“The Passing and the Coming Man”), in which he concludes his argument for

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<sup>387</sup> *CD* III/3, 222.

<sup>388</sup> *CD* III/3, 223.

<sup>389</sup> *CD* III/3, 225-226.

why Israel and the church are in covenantal union in the election of Jesus Christ, thereby necessitating each another as the one community of God. Because Israel witnesses to the judgment of God by only hearing the gospel it is “the passing man” of the community who has died in the death of Jesus Christ. Conversely, the church witnesses to the mercy of God by hearing and believing the gospel and is thus “the coming man” of the community who has arisen to life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Barth declares that,

The elected community of God as the environment of the elected man, Jesus of Nazareth, and therefore as the place where God’s honour dwells, must correspond to this twofold determination of its Head by existing itself also in a twofold form, in a passing and a coming form, in a form of death and a form of life. It fulfills its determination grounded in its election by representing in bodily form and attesting to the world both the death taken away by God from man and also the life bestowed on man by God.<sup>390</sup>

Barth begins with Israel by pointing out how it is “the passing man” which witnesses to all people that those who resist the grace of God do so at their peril, and yet in spite of that, to their ultimate salvation. Barth contends that Israel’s

special contribution to the work of the whole community then consists in the critical reminder that the man who resists God is in the process of passing, that he must pass *in order to receive incorruptible life in peace with God*, and that for his salvation he will not be spared this passing—in and with the passing to which God has subjected Himself in His Son. *The Church needs this contribution.*<sup>391</sup>

However, Barth recognizes that not all of Israel know they witness to Jesus Christ because many Jews still do not believe in him and, according to Matthias Gockel, only “those Jews who are obedient to the election of Israel are witnesses to the passing of the old human being and thus to God’s mercy not only for themselves but also for the Gentiles. Here it is central to recognize that Barth sees the Christian church not simply as the church of the Gentiles but as the church of *Jews and*

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<sup>390</sup> CD II/2, 260.

<sup>391</sup> CD II/2, 260. Emphases mine.

*Gentiles.*”<sup>392</sup> Ultimately, though, all of believing and unbelieving Israel is the form of the community that testifies to the type of humanity that no longer exists because of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hill remarks that,

The point at issue for Barth is not whether the majority of Israel is eternally lost and the believing remnant is saved. Rather, Israel as a whole, both the Israel who has believed in Jesus and the Israel who remains unbelieving, are unalterably elect, which means they have been ordained by God for the purpose of bearing witness to God’s own self-presentation in Christ.<sup>393</sup>

It is necessary, then, to understand Barth’s construal of Israel as “the passing man” which is a reminder to the church why God deals severely with humanity for the sake of the community’s salvation. Barth states that,

The community of God in its Israelite form discloses what God elects for Himself when in His eternal election of grace He elects fellowship with man. He chooses for Himself what is not His due, what is not worthy of Him, the frailty of the flesh, suffering, dying, death, in order to take it away from man, in order to clothe man instead with His glory.<sup>394</sup>

The reason Barth believes God deals so harshly with Israel for its salvation (including the rest of humanity) is because of the covenant he has decreed in eternity and fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hence “the depth of [Israel’s] need is the depth to which God does not count it too costly to condescend for the sake of His eternal covenant with man.”<sup>395</sup> Thus, there is a continuity between Israel as “the passing man” of the community of God and the declaration of God against all religion(s) as faithlessness. Those in Israel who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ are an analogy from which to see the rest of humanity’s futile attempt to

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<sup>392</sup> Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 193. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>393</sup> Hill, “The Church as Israel,” 155.

<sup>394</sup> *CD II/2*, 260-261.

<sup>395</sup> *CD II/2*, 261.

justify itself by attempting to relate to God through religion. Barth states that, “In this form [Israel] proclaims man’s helplessness without God’s help, the vanity of all the illusions of self-sufficiency at which he continually snatches, [i.e.,] the sole sufficiency of divine mercy.”<sup>396</sup> Likewise, Lindsay remarks that, “Barth’s intent is to demonstrate that the non-Jewish world is at least as unfaithful and as undeserving of God’s grace as the Jews, nonetheless it is the Jews who are burdened with being the true representation of that disobedience and infidelity.”<sup>397</sup> For Barth, the eternal election of Israel lies in and is witnessed to in its temporally passing form; and yet he believes Israel will not eternally remain as “the passing man” but will be raised to life in the church. Whether Israel comes to faith in its Messiah sooner or later is not discussed by Barth; rather, he argues that Israel, as “the passing man,” with its witness to divine judgment will be fully and finally redeemed when it rises to life in the church. According to Barth,

If Israel were obedient to its election, its special witness to the passing of the old man and his world, taken up [*aufgenommen*] into the confession by the whole community of God’s coming kingdom, would supplement and harmonise [*ergänzen und... zusammenklingen*] with the Church’s witness of hope founded on the resurrection of Christ.<sup>398</sup>

In fact, Barth is so confident of Israel’s inevitable rising to life in the church, he declares quite boldly that,

the coming of the new man has indeed taken place already in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, the promised Son of Abraham. In Him, therefore, Israel already has become new. It has already been translated from death to life. Its hope (with that of the Gentiles) has already become present. Its position and task in the Church have already been appointed for it. Everything has happened that can serve its temporal and eternal peace. What does not happen, however, is that Israel as such and as a whole takes up this position [*diese*

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<sup>396</sup> CD II/2, 261.

<sup>397</sup> Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus*, 81.

<sup>398</sup> CD II/2, 262; KD II/2, 288.



*seine Stellung bezieht*], thus actualising the fact that old things have passed away, and all things are become new.<sup>399</sup>

Because Israel is “the passing man” of the community, the church is “the coming man” in whom Jews and Gentiles alike participate in and witness to the eternal life accomplished for all in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, for Barth, the church’s identity is not dependent upon Israel’s faithfulness or the lack thereof. Rather he contends that, “Independent of Israel’s choice and way, the service of the Church as the perfect form of the one community of God consists in attesting, by faith in the Word heard, by laying hold of the divine mercy, the coming kingdom of God as the end of all human need, the coming new man and his eternal life.”<sup>400</sup> The church is characterized as “the coming man” in its witness to the world (which includes Israel) because, in Jesus Christ, God has broken the power of sin and death and re-constituted a new humanity – the church of Jews and Gentiles. Barth declares that, “The Church exists among Jews and Gentiles because Jesus in his resurrection does not shatter the power of death in vain but with immediate effect; because as the witness to eternal life He cannot remain alone but at once awakens, gathers and sends forth recipients, partners and co-witnesses of this life.”<sup>401</sup> Jesus Christ determines the church’s witness so that, negatively, it cannot proclaim itself as the source and power to be “the coming man” and so that, positively, it must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, which includes his passion, crucifixion, and resurrection and all humanity in him. Barth argues that, “The Church thus proclaims Jesus’ exaltation as the goal of his humiliation, His kingdom

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<sup>399</sup> *CD* II/2, 262; *KD* II/2, 289.

<sup>400</sup> *CD* II/2, 264.

<sup>401</sup> *CD* II/2, 264.

as the goal of His suffering, His coming as the goal of His passing. It proclaims what in God's hands is to become and can become of man taken up and accepted [*auf- und angenommen*] by Him."<sup>402</sup>

Therefore, one sees in Barth's doctrine of Israel as "the passing man" and the church as "the coming man" the dialectical movement of sublimation in which the disobedience of Israel, as evidenced in Judaism, is abolished in order to be purified in the obedience of the church, as evidenced in the Christian religion. Drawing analogously upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Barth argues that, "As the crucifixion of Jesus is a divine benefit in its association with His resurrection, so also is Israel's history of suffering in its association with the pre-history of the Gospel enacted within it."<sup>403</sup> Just as the church and the gospel it proclaims pre-existed in Israel and its law, so too the church emerged out of Israel and brought with and purified Israel in the event of its sublimation, even though the majority of Israel historically and currently refuses to believe in Jesus Christ. However, even though Israel continues in faithlessness Barth believes this must not paralyze the church and its witness to Jesus Christ because, "Though waiting for Israel's conversion, [the church] cannot and will not hesitate to precede Israel with the confession of the unity of God's community, the unity of the man who, according to the will of the divine mercy, both passes and comes in the person of Him who has suffered death for all and brought life to light for all."<sup>404</sup> The church needs Israel because without it the Christian religion cannot know that it is the true religion as founded upon and

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<sup>402</sup> *CD* II/2, 264-265; *KD* II/2, 291.

<sup>403</sup> *CD* II/2, 266.

<sup>404</sup> *CD* II/2, 267.

determined by the covenant of God in the election of Jesus Christ, which includes the election of Israel to “rise to life” in the church.

In the light of this one must now reckon with another controversial issue regarding the faithlessness of Judaism and the sublimation of the Christian religion in the relationship between Barth’s doctrines of religion and election, particularly the election of the community of Israel and the church. Sonderegger sets forth the issue when she states that, “Judaism cannot be a religion, Barth claimed, separate from, inferior to, or, under its own terms, equal with Christianity [... Judaism] has no independent existence or reality, no separate identity before which Christians should feel the respect that belongs to something truly foreign.”<sup>405</sup> To appreciate fully this claim one must again venture outside §34 and into §72.4 (“The Ministry of the Community”) wherein Barth discusses the church’s “mission” to Jews. Discussed in the context of the mission of the church to the heathen, Barth treats the church’s “mission” to the Jews separately because,

In relation to the Synagogue there can be no real question of “mission” or of bringing the Gospel. It is thus unfortunate to speak of Jewish missions. The Jew who is conscious of his Judaism and takes it seriously can only think that he is misunderstood and insulted when he hears this term. And the community has to see that materially he is right. Mission is not the witness which it owes to Israel.<sup>406</sup>

The traditional theological reasoning behind the church’s “mission” to the Jews derives from the assertion that because the Christian religion is the true religion,

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<sup>405</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 8. Within the above quote Sonderegger also states that, “In Barth’s eyes, [Judaism] cannot—strictly speaking—be considered a religion at all.” Although one must agree that Judaism (i.e., faithless Israel) cannot exist as a religion in independence from Christianity (i.e., the church) and *vice versa*, one must disagree that Barth did not consider Judaism a religion at all, for Judaism is precisely the religious expression of Israel as evidenced in its rejection of Jesus Christ for which it was elected.

<sup>406</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 877. Hereafter *CD* IV/3.2.

Judaism is only a religious aberration like all other religions and, therefore, the Jews need to be evangelised just as much as the heathen. Sonderegger comments that,

Judaism became a religion, perhaps a tolerated religion, but not an equal [to the Christian religion]. After all, its inferiority in the eyes of the Christian West, among liberals and the orthodox, defined the modern Jewish mission and encouraged missionaries to consider the Jews a people misunderstood and shamefully treated, who wait only for a sympathetic guide to the full truth of their religion.<sup>407</sup>

In contrast to the traditional perception of Judaism, and its relationship to the Christian religion, Barth argues against missions to the Jews because of their election in Jesus Christ.

The first reason why, for Barth, the church need not concentrate any missionary efforts on the Jews, is because they are the first and continual people of God. Because the Jews are eternally elected in Jesus Christ, they are the people of God and so are always related to God, even if their current relationship to God is faithlessness and rejection. This is why, according to Barth,

in relation to the Synagogue there can be no question of the [church] proclaiming the true faith in place of a false, or opposing the true God to an idol. The God whose work and Word it has to attest to the world was the God of Israel before the [church] itself ever came forth from this people, and to this day He can only be the God of Israel [... The Jews] are the people of God loved by Him in free grace, elected and called to His service, and originally sent into the world as His witnesses.<sup>408</sup>

Israel is, in spite of its faithlessness, still the people of God, meaning the Christian religion cannot understand its relationship to it as alien and superior because it assumes it is sublimated apart from it. Rather, part and parcel of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine election is for the church to confess continually that Israel is in covenantal union with it thereby rendering any and all “missions” to the

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<sup>407</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 141.

<sup>408</sup> CD IV/3.2, 877.

Jews as self-negating and self-defeating. Barth declares that, “The Gentile Christian community of every age and land is a guest in the house of Israel. It assumes the election and calling of Israel. It lives in fellowship with the King of Israel.”<sup>409</sup> It is the eternal covenant in Jesus Christ as the electing God and rejected human and the simultaneous election of the twofold community in him that Israel and the church are a differentiated and yet necessitated unity. Sonderegger remarks that, for Barth, “Judaism is not a religion or confession; it has no independent status outside the Church. Judaism is the Synagogue—though it should not be—and it finds its place next to the Church in the one body of Christ.”<sup>410</sup>

However, should one assume that, for Barth, Israel’s current religious expression as Judaism is acceptable to the God who elects it in Jesus Christ, they must remember how Israel’s form is one of judgment, faithlessness, and passing away. This is the second reason, however counter-intuitive, that Christians need not evangelise Jews since their rejection of Messiah Jesus serves the sublimation of the Christian religion, which also includes Judaism. Barth argues that, inasmuch as Israel is eternally elected,

there is [also] the shattering fact that at the decisive moment the same Israel denied its election and calling, that when it eventuated it did not receive the promised consolation, that when it was fulfilled it did not believe the Word of God spoken to it by Moses and the prophets, that when its King appeared among it He was despised and rejected and delivered up to the Gentiles.<sup>411</sup>

Further, as the history of religion(s) has shown, after rejecting their Messiah, the Jews (re)created a “religion,” which, for Barth, is a hollow and futile attempt to perpetuate the temple cultus not only without the temple apparatus post-70 CE but

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<sup>409</sup> CD IV/3.2, 877.

<sup>410</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 141.

<sup>411</sup> CD IV/3.2, 877.

ultimately after the crucifixion and resurrection of their Messiah. And yet the emergence of the Synagogue, in all its irrationality and obduracy, is still not reason enough to authorize any “mission” to the Jews because its futile existence testifies to the church, as comprised of Jews and Gentiles, that it is sublimated all the while awaiting Israel’s eventual rising to life in the church. Barth concludes that,

the Synagogue became and was and still is the organisation of a group of men [*Menschheit*] which hastens towards a future that is empty now that [Jesus] has come who should come, which is still without consolation, which clings to a Word of God that is still unfulfilled. Necessarily, therefore, the Jew who is uniquely blessed offers the picture of an existence which, characterised by the rejection of its Messiah and therefore of its salvation and mission, is dreadfully empty of grace and blessing. Necessarily [the Jew] reflects the same existence without grace to which we poor heathen would be hopelessly abandoned apart from that which has taken place for us and has been manifested to us in the person of the one Jew.<sup>412</sup>

What remains is the church’s provocation of Israel to “rise to life” in it.

No shortage of ink has been spilled in the attempt to understand how the church is to “provoke” Israel to jealousy and thereby entice it to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is her Messiah. Barth describes this “provocation” by arguing that,

By [the church’s] whole existence as the community of the King of the Jews manifested to it as the Saviour of the world, it must set before [Israel] the fact of the event of the consolation of the fulfilled Word of God, confronting [Israel] with the monument of the free election, calling and grace of God which have not been despised but gratefully accepted and grasped. [The church] must make dear and desirable and illuminating to [Israel] Him whom it has rejected. It must be able to set Him clearly before it as the Messiah already come. [The church] must call [Israel] by joining with it as His people, and therefore with Him. No particular function can be this call, but only the life of the community as a whole authentically lived before the Jews.<sup>413</sup>

Because Barth draws upon his mature doctrine of election, one cannot interpret Judaism as an independent religion apart from the Christian religion. According to

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<sup>412</sup> CD IV/3.2, 877; *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/3.2 (Zürich: EVZ, 1959), 1006. Hereafter *KD* IV/3.2.

<sup>413</sup> CD IV/3.2, 878.

Sonderegger, the traditional “*Judenmission*, then, is insulting, and unfortunate, not because Judaism is a religion Christians tolerate, but because the Jews have already received the promises and heard [though not yet believed] the truth: they are the elected people, [yet they remain] disobedient to their election.”<sup>414</sup> The church has no need “to convert” Jews into Christians but only to proclaim the election of all humans in Jesus Christ who was rejected for all humans; and although the church desires to see all Jews come to faith in Messiah Jesus, Israel’s continual obduracy will not paralyze its mission but rather provoke it all the more to proclaim the gospel to all nations, including the Jewish one. This is why, for Barth, “The Church must live with the Synagogue, not, as fools say in their hearts, as with another religion or confession, but as with the root from which it has itself sprung.”<sup>415</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter it has been argued how the doctrine of the covenant determines Barth’s doctrine of the election of the community of God, which is comprised of Israel and the church as a twofold witness to the divine judgment and divine mercy, the hearing and believing of the gospel, and the passing and coming man as revealed in and determined by the election of Jesus Christ. Moreover, Barth’s understanding of the covenantal relationship between the church and Israel undergoes a significant alteration between §17.3 and §34 because in §§32-33 Barth revolutionizes his doctrine of election. In the light of the exegesis of §34, it is argued that Barth’s mature doctrine of election helps better elucidate his prior argument for why the Christian religion is the true religion in covenantal relationship with Israel, which stems from Barth’s Christocentric reconstruction of the doctrine of election wherein

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<sup>414</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 142.

<sup>415</sup> *CD IV/3.2*, 878.

Jesus Christ is the object and subject of election. Sonderegger is correct that Barth's "Christological center of the doctrine of election demands that all other elections of Israel, the Church, and the individual, serve that one divine decree, that the Son would obey the Father through the power of the Spirit and assume sinful flesh."<sup>416</sup>

Moreover, it has been shown how Barth maintains a theologically robust anti-Judaism but carefully and rightly avoids all forms of anti-Semitism, for as Lindsay remarks, "while we may baulk at some of Barth's phraseology, he must nonetheless be credited with an unambiguous repudiation of secular and theological antisemitism, a thoroughgoing endorsement of the Jews' continuing status as God's chosen and beloved people, and a realization of the necessity of solidarity with them."<sup>417</sup> For Barth, Israel's witness to the divine judgment, its hearing but not believing the gospel and being a passing form, all serve the sublimation of the Christian religion because without Israel, the Christian religion can never be the true religion which witnesses to the divine mercy, hears and believes the gospel, and exists as the form of the coming human. McDonald summarizes well Barth's doctrine of the election of the community of God when she states that,

in accordance with the shape of Christ's election as the one who, in covenant faithfulness and for the sake of the covenant promises, bears in himself humanity's rejection of God and God's rejection of human rebellion, so the elect communities of Israel and the church are the place in which not only the covenant promises of blessing but also the alienation and rebellion of humanity as a whole are concentrated, as part of the dynamic by which God refuses to allow human sin to thwart his intention to bless. Thus, the covenant community exists as a sign of hope for the apparently rejected, and not of the racial exclusion of those outside its boundaries.<sup>418</sup>

Next is the third "aspect" of the Christian religion's sublimation as justification.

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<sup>416</sup> Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ*, 130.

<sup>417</sup> Lindsay, *Barth, Israel*, 83.

<sup>418</sup> McDonald, *Re-imaging*, 167.



## **CHAPTER 4: THE REDEMPTION OF RELIGION AS JUSTIFICATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter it will be contended that Barth's argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification has strong theological continuity with his mature doctrine of justification in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, §61 ("The Justification of Man"). It will be argued how, in Barth's mature doctrine of justification, the theme of the forgiveness of sins is the concept having the most continuity with his earlier argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification. The chapter begins with an exegesis of the third "aspect" by which God sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion and spends most of its attention on the motif of the forgiveness of sins as argued in §17.3. It will also be shown how the *simul iustus et peccator* analogy used earlier by Barth in §17.3 determines his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification. After completing the exegesis of §17.3 it moves to exposit §61 wherein it will be argued how, for Barth, the doctrine of justification is a necessary doctrine but should not rule over all other doctrines, why the justification of God is the presupposition of and consequently revealed in the justification of the sinner, that the forgiveness of sins in §61.3 displays the strongest theological continuity with §17.3 and, finally, that justification by faith alone is the corresponding antithesis to religion as faithlessness.

### **THE SUBLIMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AS JUSTIFICATION**

Although the divine justification of the Christian religion is the third of the four "aspects" by which God sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion, it is argued that it is the zenith of Barth's argument in §17.3 for the Christian religion as the true religion. Not only does Barth quantitatively expend the most time on this

“aspect,” he also sees it as the qualitative culmination of the creation and election of the Christian religion with sanctification succeeding justification as its necessary consequence. For Barth, the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification presupposes the divine pardon of its faithlessness, which is why he argues that the Christian religion is the true religion “in virtue of the divine justification of sinners, of the divine forgiveness of sins.”<sup>419</sup> At this point Barth re-introduces the analogy of the *simul iustus et peccator* as the theological paradigm for understanding the Christian religion as the true religion. He begins by remarking that the “structure of this [Christian] religion (most acutely in its Protestant form) is certainly quite different from that of others. And this, too, we can understand and assess only as the work of the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>420</sup> However, if Barth were to end on this point it would only be a half-truth, which is why he immediately continues with the qualifying statement that the Christian religion, as one religion among many, “is not so decidedly different from others that in respect of it we can evade the judgment of the divine revelation that all religion is idolatry and self-righteousness.”<sup>421</sup> Consequently, the Christian religion can never claim an initial self-righteousness and yet be later purged of all self-righteousness because, in its historicity as a religion, it is always entangled in Adamic history, which is faithlessness. Barth argues that

history in the Christian sense, whether the history of the Church as a whole or the life-story of the individual child of God in particular, stands always under this sign [i.e., faithlessness]. The more closely we study it, or rather, the more clearly the light of revelation from Holy Scripture falls upon it, the more evident this is.

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<sup>419</sup> CD I/2, 352. However, it is puzzling and unfortunate that Barth provides no scriptural exegesis for this aspect as he does for the other three aspects.

<sup>420</sup> CD I/2, 352.

<sup>421</sup> CD I/2, 352.

Both as a whole and in particular it is a sinful story. It is not justified in itself. It is sinful both in form and also in its human origin. It is no less so than can be said of the story of Buddhism or of Islam. The hands into which God has delivered Himself in His revelation are thoroughly unclean. In fact, they are seriously unclean.<sup>422</sup>

This negative limitation serves Barth's argument for the justification of the Christian religion because, as a religion, it cannot point to any inherent righteousness to counter-balance or overcome its unrighteousness. Barth states that, "If our knowledge of the truth of the Christian religion were determined by the life of an immanent purity of the Church of God as its *locus*, or of the children of God as its vehicles, it would have been permanently concealed."<sup>423</sup> The concrete effect of and by the church, in its errant attempt to perceive its innate self-justification as the true religion, is seen when the church gazes at its supposed self-righteousness and shuts its ears to the Word of God. According to Barth, the church will "not hear the Word by which the Church and the children of God are clean [*rein*] in their uncleanness [*Unreinheit*] and in all their unredeemedness redeemed [*und Erlöste in ihrer ganzen Unerlöstheit*]."<sup>424</sup> One of the many phenomena of the futility of the Christian religion's attempts to justify itself is seen when its adherents try to marshal an innumerable amount of "facts" upon which they believe the Christian religion can prove it is the true religion. Barth, however, denies the validity of all so-called "facts" because he believes the only "fact" to be accepted is that all these "facts" are misleading. For Barth, this fact "powerfully and decisively confirms the assertion [that the Christian religion is the true religion], depriving it of its arbitrary character

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<sup>422</sup> CD I/2, 352-353.

<sup>423</sup> CD I/2, 353.

<sup>424</sup> CD I/2, 353; KD I/2, 387.

and giving to it a necessity which is absolute.”<sup>425</sup> To substantiate his point Barth provides various analogies he believes are illustrative of the relationship between the just God and the Christian religion as justified by him. Barth contends that,

the fact about which we are speaking [i.e., justification of the Christian religion] stands in the same relationship to this realm [i.e., human religion] as does the sun to the earth. That the sun lights up this part of the earth and not that means for the earth no less than this, that day rules in the one part and night in the other. Yet the earth is the same in both places. In neither place is there anything in the earth itself to dispose it for the day. Apart from the sun it would everywhere be enwrapped in eternal night. The fact that it is partly in the day does not derive in any sense from the nature of the particular part as such. *Now it is in exactly the same way* that the light of the righteousness and judgment of God falls upon the world of man’s religion, upon one part of that world, upon the Christian religion, so that that religion is not in the night but in the day, it is not perverted but straight, it is not false religion but true. Taken by itself, it is still human religion and therefore unbelief [*Unglaube*], like all other religions. Neither in the root nor in the crown of this particular tree, neither at the source nor at the outflow of this particular stream, neither on the surface nor in the depth of this particular humanity can we point to anything that makes it suitable for the day of divine righteousness and judgment.<sup>426</sup>

These analogies are meant to serve the “fact” of the Christian religion’s simultaneous faithlessness and justification and, therefore, it being the true religion. However, this thesis disagrees with Barth’s use of one particular analogy, for even if he does not stretch its meaning beyond its theological elasticity it is more unhelpful than helpful. Regarding Barth’s sun-and-earth analogy, it is argued that it does not further substantiate the *simul iustus et peccator* of the Christian religion, but rather (unwittingly) posits a *partim iustus et partim peccator* understanding of the Christian religion as the true religion. This is not to say that this analogy is wholly unhelpful as Barth is correct that all religions (i.e., “earth”) are wholly faithlessness regardless if God (i.e., “sun”) sublimates one, all, or none of them. One may further agree with Barth that, even though the Christian religion has been and is sublimated, it has no

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<sup>425</sup> CD I/2, 353.

<sup>426</sup> CD I/2, 353; KD I/2, 388. Emphasis mine.

innate, justifiable essence or right to exist in the light of God's grace but is exclusively so because he shines on it in his sovereign freedom. The aspect of the analogy that is most disconcerting is when Barth states how the sun illuminates only one part of the earth meaning the "day rules in one part and night in the other."

Although Barth is continuous in his argument for the exclusive sublimation of the Christian religion, his phraseology suggests that, in the event of the self-revelation of God, the Christian religion ceases to be a religion as it is no longer in the "night" of faithlessness but now wholly stands in the "day" of the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. Even though Barth's next statement ("the earth is the same in both places") upholds the universality of the faithlessness of all religions, he elides the paradoxical power and theological force of the *simul iustus et peccator* that vindicates his bestowing of the title of "The True Religion" on the Christian religion. In fact, Barth would have done better not to use this analogy in this way but rather to emphasise the "fact" that even though the sun fully shines on one particular part of the earth, that part of the earth remains the earth, only now thoroughly illuminated. Thus, Hans Küng's summarization of Barth's mature doctrine of justification provides a necessary corrective to this aspect of his earlier understanding of the divine justification of the Christian religion when he argues that Barth's later use of the *simul* is "not dealing either in the case of the iustus or that of the peccator with a quantum as though we had here something like a fluid in connected tubes which increases on one side while it decreases on the other. In both instances the whole man is at stake."<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Response* (London: Burns & Oates, 1981), 64.

This thesis, therefore, stands in more agreement with Barth's argument for the "fact" of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ when he states that,

If the Christian religion is the right and true religion [*zur rechten und wahren Religion*], the reason for it does not reside in facts [*Tatsachen*] which might point to itself or its own adherents, but in the fact [*Tatsache*] which as the righteousness and the judgment of God confronts it as it does all other religions, characterising and differentiating it and not one of the others as the right and true [*rechte und wahre*] religion.<sup>428</sup>

It is concluded, then, that Barth's use of analogies is designed to illustrate his argument more clearly but they must correspond to the *simul iustus et peccator* or else they are detrimental to his argument.

Barth continues his argument by pointing to the fact that the Christian religion is the true religion only because of God's righteous acquittal of it and not from anyone's empirical perceptions and deductions, even from the Christian religion itself. Barth declares that,

We are, of course, confronted by an acquittal which is utterly inconceivable from our standpoint. But the acquittal is a judgment. And although we have no insight into its motives, it is a righteous judgment. Therefore we cannot say that on the basis of that fact of God [*Gottestatsache*] some other religion might have become the right and true [*rechte und wahre*] religion.<sup>429</sup>

Barth precludes all indecisiveness from his understanding of the justification of the Christian religion by arguing for a proper Christian response relative to the divinely revealed knowledge that the Christian religion is sublimated in the event of God justifying it. This response is a decisive and faithful commitment to the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as evidenced in the justified sinner solely looking at

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<sup>428</sup> CD I/2, 353-354; KD I/2, 388.

<sup>429</sup> CD I/2, 354; KD I/2, 388. While humans have no natural knowledge regarding the divine rationale for the sublimation of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ reveals that the eternal motive of God was and is to sublate the Christian religion in exclusion to all others as evidenced in its election of, creation by, and sanctification for him.

the “fact of God” in his acquitting judgment and judging acquittal of the Christian religion. Barth believes

we should again forfeit the absoluteness of the perception if we did not let it stand as wholly and utterly a perception of the divine judgment and therefore of the fact of God [*Gottestatsache*], if instead we tried to squint past the fact of God [*Gottestatsache*] and to find certain conditioning factors of the judgment in the nature of the Christian religion as such. If we look at the Christian religion in itself and as such, we can only say that apart from the clear testimony of the fact of God [*Gottestatsache*] some other religion might equally well be the right and true [*rechte und wahre*] one. But once the fact of God [*Gottestatsache*] is there and its judgment passed, we cannot look at the Christian religion in itself and as such.<sup>430</sup>

Ultimately, all the purported “facts” about the Christian religion are at best irrelevant and at worse misleading in one’s understanding of its justification by God, which means, for Barth, the Christian religion’s “various qualities, far from being adduced as the basis of its justification, are not even considered or taken into account, but covered up.”<sup>431</sup> The only “fact,” which conclusively proves the sublimation of the Christian religion, is its forgiveness by God. This is why, for Barth, the forgiveness of the Christian religion is the only “fact” to which one can point to prove its justification before God. Barth believes the Christian religion

must be forgiven if it is to be justified. And we can only understand and accept its forgiveness if we understand and accept it as sheer forgiveness. For with any other interpretation and reception, we would once again peer beyond the fact of God [*Gottestatsache*], by which the Christian religion is justified, and by so doing we would once again forfeit the unconditioned nature of the knowledge of its truth.<sup>432</sup>

Just as one cannot construct and draw upon a natural theology for the sublimation of the Christian religion, so too one cannot point to its sublimation as divine justification apart from the divine revelation of its forgiveness from its sin of

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<sup>430</sup> *CD* I/2, 354; *KD* I/2, 388-389.

<sup>431</sup> *CD* I/2, 354.

<sup>432</sup> *On Religion*, 118; *KD* I/2, 389.

faithlessness. In fact, divine forgiveness, as justification, is a necessary lens through which one perceives the Christian religion as the true religion. Barth ends this part of his argument by stating that, “As forgiveness and only as forgiveness does the truth appropriate the Christian religion, and as forgiveness and only as forgiveness can the truth really be known as belonging inalienably to the Christian religion.”<sup>433</sup>

After establishing the form of the “fact” of the divine justification of the Christian religion as the forgiveness of sins Barth proceeds to delineate its content. For Barth it is not enough to assert that the Christian religion is justified because it is forgiven of its sin of faithlessness, which is why he points to the evidence of Jesus Christ as the one who reveals the God who is just in forgiving the sins of the Christian religion and thereby justifying it in the event of his self-revelation. Barth remarks that it is “quite in order to find forgiveness at this point and not at any other. It takes place according to the ordering of the act of God, that is, the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>434</sup> Barth then proceeds to argue how Jesus Christ, as the self-revelation of God, justifies the Christian religion by pointing again to the event of the incarnation of the Word of God. Barth believes the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ

denotes the unification of the eternal divine Word with the nature of man, and therefore with the rectification [*Zurechtbringung*] of that human nature, notwithstanding and in spite of its natural perversion, to humility and obedience to God. This rectification [*Zurechtbringung*] of human nature is the work of Jesus Christ from birth to death, and it is revealed to be such in His resurrection from the dead.<sup>435</sup>

Barth’s emphasis upon the incarnation of the Word and the corresponding salvific participation of religious humans, particularly Christians, in his assumption of human

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<sup>433</sup> *On Religion*, 118.

<sup>434</sup> *CD I/2*, 355.

<sup>435</sup> *CD I/2*, 355; *KD I/2*, 390.



flesh and its Adamic history does not magically divinize human flesh and history because, for Barth, even in “the human nature restored in Jesus Christ [...] there also belongs the capacity of man from which, by virtue of his nature, only religion as faithlessness [*Unglaube*] can and does in fact proceed.”<sup>436</sup> This is why Barth interprets the Christian religion as the true religion in the analogous light of the *simul iustus et peccator* since it is justifiably forgiven only by the divine intervention of God in Jesus Christ and yet still remains a sinful religion. Because God became incarnate in the human Jesus of Nazareth the individual Christian and the entire Christian religion participates in him and thereby actualizes their rectified human nature, which is justification as the forgiveness of sins. Barth states that, “In the human nature of Jesus Christ, instead of resisting God in idolatry and self-righteousness, man offers the obedience of faith. In that way he satisfies the righteousness and judgment of God. Therefore he really merits his acquittal, and therefore the acquittal, the justification of his religion.”<sup>437</sup> Barth also employs the apostle Paul’s metaphor of the body and the head because the Christian religion’s justification as forgiveness of sins is a “matter of the life of the earthly body of which Jesus Christ is the Head; i.e., of the life of those whom He has brought into fellowship with His human nature and therefore to a participation in the acquittal which He has rightly and righteously merited.”<sup>438</sup>

Inasmuch as Barth argues for a Christian’s participation in the humanity of Jesus Christ (in distinction from his deity) he also contends for this participation by faith to be “meritorious.” Barth, however, immediately negates any hint of a (semi-)

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<sup>436</sup> *On Religion*, 119; *KD I/2*, 390.

<sup>437</sup> *CD I/2*, 355.

<sup>438</sup> *CD I/2*, 355.

Pelagian understanding of humans making themselves righteous before God when he states that the “Christian religion is faith in the discipleship of the justifying faith of Jesus Christ which no man can imitate.”<sup>439</sup> Rather, the faith of the individual Christian and the Christian religion presupposes the prior determining faithfulness of Jesus Christ who alone fulfilled the righteousness of God. Barth regards the reward of the forgiveness of sins as justification as a real reward, but also

In the first instance, of course, it is made only to Jesus Christ, the only man who has maintained and demonstrated the obedience of faith. But for the sake of Jesus Christ, i.e., for the sake of the fellowship and participation guaranteed to men by Jesus Christ, for the sake of the solidarity of our humanity with His bestowed by Him, for the sake of the faith in Him of discipleship, those whom He calls His brethren, and who in that faith in Him recognise and honour their first-born brother, are also (with their religion) the objects of that righteous award of God.<sup>440</sup>

A further aspect of the divine justification as forgiveness is its unconditional nature.

The Christian religion as faithlessness only merits the wrath of God, which is why when God justifies and forgives the Christian religion in Jesus Christ it is secure in the fact that, as God has resurrected Jesus Christ, he has justified and forgiven the Christian religion. Barth points first to the forgiveness of the individual Christian and then expands his argument to include the rest of the Christian religion when he argues that, “this unconditional forgiveness applies also to their religion, of which they would have to confess, were they able and willing to regard it in itself and as such, that it is faithlessness [*Unglaube*], like the faith [*Glaube*] of other religions.”<sup>441</sup>

Barth concludes his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification by arguing how its justification is united with, but not identical to, its creation and election. Barth remarks that the “Christian religion is the justified

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<sup>439</sup> *CD* I/2, 355.

<sup>440</sup> *CD* I/2, 355.

<sup>441</sup> *On Religion*, 119; *KD* I/2, 391.

religion and therefore the right and true religion [*die rechte und also die wahre Religion*]. Beyond all dialectic and to the exclusion of all discussion the divine fact [*Gottestatsache*] of the name of Jesus Christ confirms what no other fact does or can confirm: the creation and election of this religion to be the one and only true religion [*zur einen, einzigen, wahren Religion*].”<sup>442</sup> Of course, in continuity with his argument for the divine creation and election of the Christian religion, Barth points to the “name of Jesus Christ” which is no more or less than Jesus Christ himself, meaning the justification of the Christian religion occurs in his name alone. Furthermore, the divine justification of the Christian religion is not a nominalist “as-if” but is historically concrete and fully realized in Jesus Christ, which is why Barth declares that the Christian religion “has its justification in the name of Jesus Christ, or not at all. And this justification must be achieved in the actuality of life, of the Church and the children of God.”<sup>443</sup> Finally, Barth reminds us not to fixate inordinately on the justification of the Christian religion but to remember the “fact” of God in Jesus Christ who is first, foremost, and eternally just and justified in his justification of the Christian religion. Barth states that,

It is not that some men are vindicated as opposed to others, or one part of humanity as opposed to other parts of the same humanity. It is that God Himself is vindicated as opposed to and on behalf of all men and all humanity. That it can receive and accept this is the advantage and pre-eminence of Christianity, and the light and glory in which its religion stands.<sup>444</sup>

It is Barth’s emphasis upon the justification of God and the forgiveness of sins that exhibit strong continuity between §17.3 and §61 and further substantiates his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification.

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<sup>442</sup> *CD* I/2, 356; *KD* I/2, 391.

<sup>443</sup> *CD* I/2, 356.

<sup>444</sup> *CD* I/2, 356-357.

## **THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE HUMAN AND THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**

Barth is a Protestant/Reformed theologian, which is why he formulates his mature doctrine of justification in broad continuity with the tradition he inherits. However, one should not assume that simply because Barth provides a thorough and sustained treatment on the doctrine of justification he conforms in every jot and tittle to the traditional Protestant/Reformed understanding of this doctrine. McCormack allays all fears but also (possibly) creates new ones when he states that Barth's doctrine of justification "is most certainly Protestant—not Orthodox, not Catholic, but *Protestant*. It is even *radically* Protestant. But precisely in its radicality, it never loses contact with the concerns (theological and pastoral) which motivated Calvin [and Luther], especially, in the formulations of his doctrine."<sup>445</sup> Fred Klooster also remarks regarding the totality of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation in which justification is situated that, "It should be obvious that Barth's soteriology involves an amazingly compact[!] and intricate structure which differs radically from historic Reformed theology."<sup>446</sup> The problem arising from one's attempt to understand Barth as a faithful-yet-critical theologian of the Protestant/Reformed tradition is in discerning if his critical reconstruction improves the Protestant/Reformed doctrine of justification or if it is too radical. Lutheran theologian Eberhard Jüngel contends that when Barth denies the doctrine of justification is the *Rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarium* it puts him in antithesis to the apostle Paul, when he remarks that, "For his argument to have any credibility, Barth would have to dramatically relativize the

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<sup>445</sup> Bruce McCormack, "Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 178. Author's emphasis.

<sup>446</sup> Fred Klooster, "Aspects of the Soteriology of Karl Barth," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 2/2 (1959): 11.

unique claim by Paul's gospel of justification which places a curse on anyone preaching another gospel, even an angel from heaven!"<sup>447</sup> Thus this chapter turns to investigate Barth's doctrine of justification in §61.

Barth discusses justification in the first part-volume of his doctrine of reconciliation, which Colin Gunton asserts, is "undoubtedly the finest of the part-volumes, which shows Barth to be a great theologian of the sheer grace of God in the best traditions of the Reformation."<sup>448</sup> Although one could dispute Gunton's commendation of IV/1, it is necessary to understand how Barth's doctrine of justification is not constructed in abstraction from the previous volumes of his *Church Dogmatics*. In fact, along with his doctrine of creation (III/1-4), Barth constructs his doctrine of justification as determined by his mature doctrine of election. It is Barth's intra-doctrinal dependencies that compel Gunton to state that, "Karl Barth is a systematic theologian in the respect that nothing written in one place is said without implicit or explicit reference to other theological themes."<sup>449</sup> Barth's doctrine of election determines his doctrine of justification because, according to Gunton, "salvation is the fulfillment of a covenant, an eternal covenant, according to which God purposes to bring the human race into reconciled relation with himself."<sup>450</sup> This eternal covenant is the primordial event of the triune God choosing to be the God who will be with and for humanity in Jesus Christ, particularly his community (comprised of Israel and the church). Sonderegger remarks that,

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<sup>447</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 20.

<sup>448</sup> Colin Gunton, "Salvation," in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146.

<sup>449</sup> Gunton, "Salvation," 143.

<sup>450</sup> Gunton, "Salvation," 144.

Election, in Barth's eyes, teaches the gospel of grace as it sets out the universal reach of Christ's reconciling work: all human creatures are elect in him, as he is the head of all humanity, the Lord of the whole church, the call and content that is to reach every ear, Jew and Gentile – that death, sin, and the devil are defeated in Christ.<sup>451</sup>

The human, however, broke and breaks this covenant in her sinful acts and is the one whom God confronts and condemns in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Only when the proud, sinful human is condemned in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ can she then be justified in his resurrection. McCormack contends that,

Barth defines justification materially as the act of divine judgment that restores the covenant of grace that God made with the human race in eternity-past. It is an act of judgment that consists in the *sentence* by means of which, first, the right of the covenanting God is upheld and maintained in the face of human sin and, second, the right of God's human covenant partner—a right that had belonged to that partner as a consequence of the covenant of grace but that had been forfeited through sin—is restored or returned.<sup>452</sup>

Because of his understanding of the eternal election of God to be with and for humanity in Jesus Christ, Barth has the freedom and responsibility to (re)construct the doctrine of justification, emphasizing its historicity and movement rather than being a “substance” the Christian does or does not possess. Thus, Barth begins with Jesus Christ as the electing God and rejected human as his criterion for his doctrine of justification when he declares that,

What we have to say here is that in the same judgment in which God accuses and condemns us as sinners and gives us up to death, He pardons us and places us in a new life before Him and with Him. And what we have to show is that this is possible, that the two belong together: our real sin and our real freedom from sin; our real death and our real life beyond death; the real wrath of God against us and His real grace and mercy towards us; the fulfillment of our real rejection and also of our real election. We are dealing with the history in which man is both rejected and elected, both under the wrath of God and accepted by Him in grace, both put to death and alive: existing in a state of transition, not here only, but from here to

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<sup>451</sup> Katherine Sonderegger, “Called to Salvation in Christ: Justification and Predestination,” in *What is Justification About? Reformed Contributions to an Ecumenical Theme*, eds. Michael Weinrich and John Burgess (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 134.

<sup>452</sup> McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 184. Author's emphasis.

*there*; not there only, but from *here* to there; the No of God behind and the Yes of God before, but the Yes of God only before as the No of God is behind. This history, the existence of man in his transition, and therefore in this twofold form, is the judgment of God in its positive character as the justification of man.<sup>453</sup>

Barth's doctrine of justification, therefore, testifies to the eternal historicity and historical eternality of the event in which the God of Jesus Christ is just and the justifier of the ungodly. Moreover, the perfect tense of election determines the present and future tenses of the justification of the ungodly meaning the history of the justified sinner is eminently real. Gunton argues that, for Barth, "Salvation is, in the midst of time, whatever it may mean eschatologically, the way by which a new status is given to the human being. The doctrine of justification must therefore be understood as first of all a movement brought about by divine pardon and judgment, from one status to another."<sup>454</sup> Furthermore, because God assumed flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, he participates in humanity's history of Adamic alienation from and enmity towards God to the end of overcoming this alienation and enmity through his crucifixion and resurrection so that humanity may participate in the righteousness of God. Hunsinger states that,

When Barth writes of our justification before God, that Christ's history is as such our history, he is thinking of *participatio Christi*. He is thinking of how we participate, in the present tense, precisely in what Christ has done for us in the perfect tense. He is thinking of our real participation here and now in what Christ perfectly accomplished there and then.<sup>455</sup>

However, inasmuch as Barth stresses the historicity of the justification of the ungodly, one must not conclude that he views justification as a cause of history.

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<sup>453</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1953), 516. Hereafter *CD* IV/1. Author's emphasis.

<sup>454</sup> Gunton, "Salvation," 148.

<sup>455</sup> George Hunsinger, "Fides Christo Formata: Luther, Barth, and the Joint Declaration," in *The Gospel of the Justification in Christ: Where does the Church Stand Today?*, ed. Wayne Stumme (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 76.

Gunton is correct that, “There should be no objection to a claim that salvation begins in and has its centre and end in the sovereign action of the eternal God: in that sense, it is rooted in eternity.”<sup>456</sup>

Ultimately, for Barth, the doctrine of the justification of the ungodly is not only a rehearsal of how God eternally elected to actualize in the historicity of creation the justification of sinners in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ but is the theological means by which one can understand why and how God can be just and the justifier of the ungodly. Barth remarks that, “The doctrine of justification not only narrates but explains this history. It is the attempt to see and understand in its positive sense the sentence of God which is executed in His judgment and revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>457</sup> Justification, then, has a theological ontology as revealed in and determined by Jesus Christ. Gorringer states that, for Barth, “Justification, in other words, is a way of talking about the ontology of grace, the fact that all reality exists as the out-working of God’s affirmation and is sustained by the creative work of forgiveness.”<sup>458</sup> Moreover, Barth’s doctrine of justification is not concerned with the justification of humans, but of *sinful* humans, which is only known when God forgives their sins. Also, God’s decision to justify sinful humans is not arbitrary or capricious because it is rooted in his eternal triune being as the electing God who chose rejection for himself in Jesus Christ in order that no sinful human would no longer have to suffer temporal (and possibly eternal) alienation from God for their sins. Küng surmises that, for Barth, “the justification of sinners in time is made possible and real because God from

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<sup>456</sup> Gunton, “Salvation,” 155.

<sup>457</sup> *CD IV/1*, 516.

<sup>458</sup> Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 247.



eternity has in His own Son elected condemnation for Himself, yet elected forgiveness for sinners.”<sup>459</sup>

Barth begins his doctrine of justification in §61.1 (“The Problem of the Doctrine of Justification”) by problematizing it because, in the light of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, all humans are revealed as sinners and beyond all hope of reconciling themselves with God. Furthermore, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ God has revealed himself as just in spite of the sinful attempts of humanity to destroy his incarnate Son. This twofold reality creates a crisis for the sinful human who attempts to understand how she can become just and how a just God could justify a sinful human. For Barth the doctrine of justification,

is a question of explaining the fact and extent to which in this history, or in the divine sentence on man which underlies this history, we are dealing with that which is just and right. It is a question of showing the right of God which gives right to man, and of the right which is given by God to man. The highly problematical point in the history is obviously the notorious wrong of man. In relation to God he is in the wrong, and therefore he is accused and condemned and judged by God. He is *homo peccator*, and in this history he never ceases to be *homo peccator*. How, then, in the same sentence of God and therefore in the same history, can he be *homo iustus*?<sup>460</sup>

This problem, however, is not solely negative since the sheer existence of a problem positively testifies why the doctrine of justification is of immense importance.

O’Grady remarks that the

*importance* of the problem of justification derives from the fact that in it we are dealing with the genuineness of the presupposition, the inner possibility, of the reconciliation of the world with God, insofar as this consists in a complete alteration of the human situation, a conversion of sinful man to Himself as willed and accomplished by God.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> Küng, *Justification*, 15.

<sup>460</sup> CD IV/1, 517.

<sup>461</sup> Colm O’Grady, *The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 214. Author’s emphasis.

In order to solve the problem of the justification of the ungodly one must, then, take both realities (i.e., the righteousness of God and the sinfulness of the human) in all their seriousness and proper, irreversible order, which is revealed in Jesus Christ as crucified and resurrected. Once one looks to Jesus Christ as judged and vindicated by God then they can see how being justified by God does not posit the justice of God in antithesis to his grace but sees both as a twofold salvation relative to the justification of the ungodly. For Barth, the

task of the doctrine of justification is to demonstrate the righteousness of God which overrules in the reconciling grace of God, and the grace of God which truly and actually overrules in the righteousness of God. It is the task of finding a reliable answer to the question: What is God for sinful man? and what is sinful man before the God who is for him?<sup>462</sup>

The problem of the justification of the sinner is, thus, not a “problem” for God *per se* but for the Christian and, by extension, the Christian religion because it is the community of those who believe that, in Jesus Christ, God is just in justifying them despite their sins, particularly the sin of faithlessness. Barth states that, “In the first and final instance the problem of justification is, for those whom it occupies, the problem of the fact of their own justification. [And] when we have done our best, which of us can think that we have even approximately mastered the subject, or spoken even a penultimate word in explanation of it?”<sup>463</sup> Nevertheless, the Christian religion must speak of its justification by the just God because it has been justified precisely to proclaim that it has been justified in contrast to all other religions.

The core of the problem of the justification of the sinner, for Barth, is how to explicate faithfully the fact of the transition of the sinful human to a righteous human. Barth argues that, in the doctrine of the justification of the sinner, “we have

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<sup>462</sup> CD IV/1, 518.

<sup>463</sup> CD IV/1, 519.

to do with the turning, the movement, the transition of the existence of man without God and dead into the existence of man living for God, and therefore before Him and with Him and for Him.”<sup>464</sup> The solution Barth seeks to the problem of the justification of the sinner is not, however, akin to solving a logical conundrum or attempting to find a delicate balance between a human existing simultaneously as a sinner and righteous. The solution is to acknowledge and witness to the fact that even though humans are sinners, the (divine) possibility exists so they can become righteous when God reveals his righteousness in declaring sinful humans just. Barth states that, “What we can and must say is that in the doctrine of justification we are dealing with the most pronounced and puzzling form of this transition because we are dealing specifically with the question of its final possibility.”<sup>465</sup> This transition, moreover, is not arbitrary as the sinful human’s justification is anchored in the eternal election and temporal rejection of Jesus Christ as witnessed to in his crucifixion and revealed in his resurrection. Küng summarizes Barth’s understanding of the historicity of the transition of the justified sinner when he states that, “What is important for Barth in justification is the passage of man from a state of reprobation to a state of election, from death to life. At stake in this transition is the underlying judgment God makes about man. Barth’s theology of justification tries to make this intelligible and comprehensible.”<sup>466</sup>

The final problem of the justification of the sinner is its place and role relative to other doctrines. Barth is aware that in “some forms of Christian theology

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<sup>464</sup> CD IV/1, 520.

<sup>465</sup> CD IV/1, 520.

<sup>466</sup> Küng, *Justification*, 7. These “states,” however, are not ahistorical essences but the being of the human in her particular and peculiar history in which she is “caught up” in *being* sinful to *being* just in Christ.

the doctrine of justification has had the function of a basic and central dogma in relation to which everything else will be either presupposition or consequence, either prologue or epilogue; that its significance has been that of *the* Word of Gospel.”<sup>467</sup>

This does not mean the doctrine of justification must rule over all other doctrines even though, at times in the history of the church, it has been utilized as such. Barth provides the examples of Augustine opposing the works-righteousness of Pelagius, Luther’s criticisms of the abuses of Medieval Catholicism, Protestant Orthodoxy’s anaemic stance against Enlightenment secular humanism and even his contemporary church’s opposition to humanistic religiosity. Despite these polemical high-points where the doctrine of the justification of the sinner was under attack and needed to be re-asserted with the utmost vigour by the church, Barth believes it is not the doctrine to rule over all others. Rather, he argues that, “in theology it is good to look beyond the needs and necessities of the moment, to exercise restraint in a reaction however justified, to be constantly aware of the limits of the ruling trend (however true and well-founded it may be).”<sup>468</sup> This does not mean Barth denigrates the doctrine of justification; rather, he posits a more “realistic” understanding of its importance thereby not wanting to exalt nor abase it beyond its divinely determined limits as revealed in Jesus Christ. Thus, McGrath is correct to state that, “Barth’s primary concern is to show that the ‘article of justification,’ as a matter of historical fact, has not consistently nor constantly been at the center of theological reflection.”<sup>469</sup> In fact, the only “doctrine” worthy to rule over all doctrines (including justification) is,

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<sup>467</sup> CD IV/1, 521. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>468</sup> CD IV/1, 523.

<sup>469</sup> Alister McGrath, “Karl Barth’s doctrine of Justification from an Evangelical Perspective,” in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 184.

for Barth, Jesus Christ. This is not to say Jesus Christ is merely a doctrine or that Christology is to rule over all other doctrines; rather, for Barth, it is to say that Jesus Christ himself is to rule over all doctrines, including justification. Earlier in this chapter Jüngel was quoted as seen in his argument to reassert the primacy of the doctrine of justification over all other doctrines and, more recently, John Webster believes the doctrine of the Trinity should be the doctrine to rule over all other doctrines, particularly justification when he states that,

The ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is not one doctrine among others; it is both foundational and pervasive. To expound any Christian doctrine is to expound with varying degrees of directness the doctrine of the Trinity; to expound the doctrine of the Trinity in its full scope is to expound the entirety of Christian dogmatics.<sup>470</sup>

Webster's thesis reveals himself as situated in the tradition of classical Christian theology, which constructs its doctrine of God before and apart from his relation to creation. According to Webster, the "topic of God is materially (and so logically) prior to the topic of God's works because these works are grounded in God's being in and for himself."<sup>471</sup> And yet Webster concedes that although the material and logical ordering is God and then the works of God, the formal ordering and prioritizing of a doctrine (e.g., justification) relative to other doctrines is ultimately arbitrary but with qualifications. Webster states that "the material order is not necessarily the order of exposition, and it would be quite possible to begin an account of Christian doctrine at any point, provided that proper attention is paid to systematic scope in order to prevent the hypertrophy of one article at the price of the

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<sup>470</sup> John Webster, "*Rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarium?* The Place of the Doctrine of Justification," in *What is Justification About? Reformed Contributions to an Ecumenical Theme*, eds. Michael Weinrich and John Burgess (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 35.

<sup>471</sup> Webster, "*Rector*," 38.

atrophy of another.”<sup>472</sup> Hence, Webster is correct that one doctrine (e.g., justification or Trinity) cannot and should not rule over all other doctrines, as all doctrines, regardless of their importance to a particular tradition of the church are relativized by and subservient to Jesus Christ. Moreover, for Barth, the justification of the sinner is sufficient testimony why the doctrine of justification cannot rule over all other doctrines when he argues that,

It is the justification of man itself, and our very confidence in the objective truth of the doctrine of justification, which forbids us to postulate that in the true Church its theological outworking must *semper, ubique et ab omnibus* be regarded and treated as the *unum necessarium*, the centre or culminating point of the Christian message or Christian doctrine.<sup>473</sup>

Where Webster is incorrect in his doctrinal relativization of justification under the Trinity is not in his elevation of the Trinity over justification *per se* but in his relegation of the salvific act of justification under the doxological teleology of that act; i.e., the purpose for the justification of the sinner serves the glorification of the triune God. Webster contends that,

The saving work of God, including his work as the one who justifies sinners, is a central episode in the gospel. The theme of the gospel, however, is the eternal glory of the triune God, a glory that includes (though infinitely exceeds) the glorification of God’s creatures. Soteriology may be the leading edge of a theological account of the gospel; but the order of knowing may not shape the order of being [so] that God’s immanent life and glory are relegated to mere background.<sup>474</sup>

Just as in chapter two where this thesis disagreed with Crisp’s contention that God’s justification of creation only serves, but is not identical with, his glorification so too it disagrees here with Webster’s argument that the justification of the sinner merely serves the glorification of God rather than being identical with it. Although Webster

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<sup>472</sup> Webster, “*Rector*,” 38.

<sup>473</sup> CD IV/1, 524.

<sup>474</sup> Webster, “*Rector*,” 46.

is correct that the glorification of God includes and even exceeds the creature (as the creature will never be more or less than what God created it to be), this does not warrant the formal, material, and functional reduction of justification to glorification as argued by Webster. Rather, Barth's doctrine of justification posits first and always the justification of God and then the sinner, which provides a necessary corrective to Webster's separation of the justification of the sinner from the glorification of God. Because he argues that God is eternally just as revealed in his justification of the sinner in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Barth does not fall into the potentially false dichotomy unwittingly proposed by Webster (and Crisp) wherein God's justification of the sinner (to say nothing of God) is only but a means to glorification. Even though Webster is justified in his concern that the glorification of God not be pushed into the theological background while the salvific exigencies of the sinful human's moment monopolize the church's proclamation of the gospel, one should not agree with his contention that the theme of the gospel is the glorification of God over, above, and apart from the justification of the sinner. Rather, one should agree with Barth for whom the justification of the sinner presupposes the prior, eternal self-justification of God, which is the self-glorification of God. In contrast to Crisp's thesis Webster keeps glorification and salvation (i.e., justification) closer but not to the extent Barth does as he believes God's self-justification corresponds to and thus includes the justification of the sinner. Surprisingly, Webster unwittingly provides his own corrective when he states that,

What is required is a metaphysics in which relation to God is conceived neither in terms of a preconceived conception of ontological union, nor in terms of an abstract opposition between divine and creaturely being, but in accordance with

the canon's recital of the differentiated fellowship of the perfect triune life-giver and the creatures of his mercy.<sup>475</sup>

The final reason why Barth regards the doctrine of justification not to be the ruler over all other doctrines is because justification is of equal importance with sanctification and vocation. Barth believes the church must always "express and assert [the doctrine of justification] with its particular importance and difficulty and function. But we have also to remember that it relates only to one aspect of the Christian message of reconciliation. We have to understand this aspect with others. Neither explicitly nor implicitly have we to overlook this aspect."<sup>476</sup> O'Grady further remarks that Barth's

doctrine of justification is but one aspect of the doctrine of reconciliation. Besides the form of justification, the reconciling grace of God takes the form of sanctification, and also the form and dimension of man's vocation. These are all *different* aspects or moments of God's reconciling action. Justification, for example, does not merge into sanctification, nor sanctification into justification. But as moments of His *one* reconciling grace they are intimately linked together.<sup>477</sup>

However, not all theologians find Barth's relativization of the doctrine of justification acceptable, particularly Jüngel who believes Barth's simultaneous removal of the doctrine of justification as *Rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarium* and elevation of the doctrines of sanctification and vocation to an equal status with the doctrine of justification, along with his historical-polemical view of the employment of the doctrine of justification are misplaced. Jüngel remarks that,

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<sup>475</sup> Webster, "*Rector*," 55. Inasmuch as the term "metaphysics" is not preferred to describe God, his creation, and their relationship ("theological ontology" is preferred) Webster is correct that the church must allow the language, categories, and concepts as provided in Holy Scripture to determine the church's doctrinal formulations regardless of what order it structures them in.

<sup>476</sup> CD IV/1, 523.

<sup>477</sup> O'Grady, *The Church*, 216. Author's emphasis.



It is self-evident that any theological utterance must be appropriate to both time and occasion or that it must lead to such appropriateness. And it is no doubt true that the doctrine of justification must be able to bring its particular function to bear on specific situations. But that is valid for any concrete truth. And Barth's worthy reminders in this regard are nothing more than theological platitudes.<sup>478</sup>

Inasmuch as one should sympathize with Jüngel's concerns over the potential relativizing away of the doctrine of justification, Barth upholds the necessity of the church always possessing and confessing the doctrine of justification. Barth clearly states that, "There never was and there never can be any true Christian Church without the doctrine of justification. In this sense it is indeed the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. There is no Christian Church without the truth of what God has done and does for man in virtue of its witness, without the manifestation of this truth in some form in its life and doctrine."<sup>479</sup> And yet Barth denies that the doctrine of justification should rule over all the church's other doctrines, because for him the only "doctrine" that should rule over all doctrines, including justification, is Jesus Christ. According to Barth, the "*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* is not the doctrine of justification as such, but its basis and culmination: the confession of Jesus Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2<sup>3</sup>); the knowledge of His being and activity for us and to us and with us."<sup>480</sup>

Barth's Christocentric methodology both forces and frees him to formulate his doctrine of justification as one aspect of his doctrine of reconciliation and thereby to deem the doctrine of justification as a necessary doctrine for the church. Thus, Barth does not offer mere platitudes regarding the doctrine of justification but sets about the task of delineating its proper scope, sequence, and limitations so that it

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<sup>478</sup> Jüngel, *Justification*, 24.

<sup>479</sup> CD IV/1, 523.

<sup>480</sup> CD IV/1, 527.

does not usurp the God who is just and justifies as revealed in Jesus Christ. Barth argues that, “If here, as everywhere, we allow Christ to be the centre, the starting-point and the finishing-point, we have no reason to fear that there will be any lack of unity and cohesion, and therefore of systematics in the best sense of the word.”<sup>481</sup>

What Barth does not want to see is the doctrine of justification loosed from its grounding in Jesus Christ and abstracted from the doctrines of sanctification and vocation but rather wants to see it established in Jesus Christ and related properly to sanctification and vocation. McCormack argues that, “When justification no less than sanctification and vocation is subordinated to the being and activity of Christ in this way, then its rightful place as the *prius*, the foundation of sanctification and vocation can be readily acknowledged. In this precise sense, justification is of central importance for Karl Barth.”<sup>482</sup> In proceeding to discuss how the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification relates to Barth’s mature doctrine of justification one must be aware that although he spends the most time and space on the justification of the Christian religion in §17.3, he does not view its justification as the sole hermeneutical lens through which one must interpret its creation, election, and sanctification or the only theological key that unlocks all the secrets of how and why God sublimates the Christian religion to the exclusion of all other religions.

Barth ends §61.1 by stating that,

The problem of justification does not need artificially to be absolutised and given a monopoly. It has its own dignity and necessity to which we do more and not less justice if we do not ascribe to it a totalitarian claim which is not proper to it, or allow all other questions to culminate or merge into it, or reject them altogether with an appeal to it, but if we accept it with all its limitations as this problem and try to answer it as such.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> CD IV/1, 528.

<sup>482</sup> McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 183.

In §61.2 (“The Judgment of God”) Barth argues that God is justified in relation to and in spite of the wrongs of the sinful human. The answer Barth finds regarding the problem of the doctrine of justification is in the God who is free to justify the sinful human and reveals his freedom to justify in that event. For Barth, the “fact that God acts as He does in the justification of man proves conclusively that He could not act in any way just as well as any other but that what we have here is not whim and caprice but right, the supreme right of all.”<sup>484</sup> The temptation remains, however, to understand the right of God in the light of an external law or principle apart from the God who self-reveals in Jesus Christ. According to Barth, the

exposition of the doctrine of justification has always suffered from the fact that attempts have been made to determine the right of God in the activity which has to be explained here by a hypothesis which is rashly held to be the same as His own maxim, by a natural or moral law which is thought to be recognisable as such.<sup>485</sup>

Therefore, it is necessary in solving the problem of the doctrine of justification to look away from all human laws and towards the God who is his own law. O’Grady is correct when he states that the “basic assertion in [Barth’s] doctrine of man’s justification is that it is the realization of God’s right or judgment in relation to man as wrongdoer, that it is the expression and self-affirmation of the One who is the essence and basis and source and guarantee and norm of all right.”<sup>486</sup> In Barth’s doctrine of justification the justification of God logically and chronologically precedes the justification of the sinner because, according to Bagnato, “In the

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<sup>483</sup> *CD IV/1*, 528.

<sup>484</sup> *CD IV/1*, 529.

<sup>485</sup> *CD IV/1*, 529.

<sup>486</sup> O’Grady, *The Church*, 223.

justification of the unrighteous man God also and in the first instance is justifying Himself. No less than the Essence of God is at stake.”<sup>487</sup>

Once Barth establishes how the justification of God precedes the justification of the sinner he turns to discuss the “judgment of God” as it relates to the sinful human who is justified by God. Here Barth provides an account of how the sin by which the human makes herself sinful is overcome by God when he justifies his sinful creature in the event of revealing himself as just and justifier of the ungodly. Pointing back to §60.3 (“The Fall of Man”), Barth defines the sin of the human as pride to be most evident in her act of religion. Barth states that,

in the *status corruptionis* this means that in place of the faith and obedience in which man might live at peace with God there has entered the exciting but unprofitable dialectic of what we call “religion” as the supposed exaltation of the soul to God, the setting up and worshipping of images of His supposed being and essence; religion as the action of sinful man which will inevitably involve flagrant continuations and confirmations and repetitions of his unfaithfulness [*Untreue*] and therefore sheer self-contradictions, with the continual rise and influence of the *alternatives* of doubt and scepticism and atheism; religion as a matter on which men separate and fight more perhaps than any other.<sup>488</sup>

Tragically, the human becomes and remains a sinner in her attempt to actualize her self-asserted independence from God and justify herself in doing so. God, however, will not and cannot allow this futile self-destruction to continue on the part of his creature. Even though the human attempts to deify herself in religion she can only be a creature and, therefore, exist under her divinely ordained determination as a creature. Barth continues his argument when he states that,

The religious relationship of man to God which is the inevitable consequence of his sin is a degenerate form of the covenant-relationship, the relation between the Creator and the creature. It is the empty and deeply problematical shell of that relationship. But as such it is a confirmation that that relationship has not been

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<sup>487</sup> Robert Bagnato, “Karl Barth’s Personalizing of ‘Juridical Redemption,’” *Anglican Theological Review* 49/1 (1967): 59.

<sup>488</sup> CD IV/1, 483; *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1 (Zürich: EVZ, 1953), 537. Hereafter *KD* IV/1.

destroyed by God, that God will not be mocked, that even forgetful man will not be able to forget Him. Man may escape faith and obedience, but he cannot escape—and that is what reveals the judgment under which he stands—this [his] surrogate. He has to bear witness to the Word of God and seal the fact that he cannot be without God in this way, in the form of religion, and therefore without any basis or confirmation in the divine subject, in conflict with that subject and therefore in every possible aberration.<sup>489</sup>

Because the sinfulness of the human is chiefly manifested in her religiosity she cannot thereby exalt herself to the status of divinity but neither can she absolutely sever herself off from God in her all-too-religious denial of him. Upon returning to §61.2 one sees Barth argue that,

Whatever man may do in the folly of his pride, he cannot disrupt this self-determination of God, nor can he make for himself a place or status or being in which to have genuine freedom in [the] face of God. Not even in hell can he have and enjoy this freedom. Every kind of demon possession is possible, but it is not possible to make the nature and existence of man devilish.<sup>490</sup>

This does not mean the sin of the human is reduced to an aspect of finitude, or that her violation of the law of God is morally excusable, or even God's justification of her is his turning a blind eye to her sin. Jüngel states that, for Barth, the "justification of the ungodly is anything but the justification of what exists, and certainly not the justification of existing ungodliness. Rather, it means the removal of all that. It is the most far-reaching attack imaginable on the real life context of an ungodly world."<sup>491</sup> God's justification of the sinful human is nothing less than a re-creation of the human, not into a semi-divine super-human, but into the very good creature who must live in covenantal obedience to God. Barth contends that,

The fact that God applies and reveals His right means that between Him and the wrong of man, which is to say at once between Him and the man who puts himself in the wrong, there arises a conflict and crisis in which the man who puts

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<sup>489</sup> CD IV/1, 483.

<sup>490</sup> CD IV/1, 534.

<sup>491</sup> Jüngel, *Justification*, 81.

himself in the wrong is not the judge of God, but in virtue of the unconditional superiority of His right God is the judge of man. Man's wrong, i.e., man himself as a wrongdoer cannot stand in the judgment of God. The righteousness of God means God's negating and overcoming and taking away and destroying wrong and man as the doer of it.<sup>492</sup>

In the light of Barth's understanding of God's self-justification and the sinner in spite of her sin it is clear the same sin the individual sinful human commits also occurs on a communal level as seen in the faithlessness of the Christian religion. The arrogance and pride that vaunt the individual sinful human before God also stimulate the Christian religion to declare itself to be the true religion without the necessary recourse to its sublimation by God as revealed in his justification of the Christian religion. To this effect Jüngel is quoted (even though he discusses individual Christians) when he argues that

there is no difference between the sin of non-Christians and that of Christians. Unbelief and superstition by no means only appear as evidence of non-Christian living. Rather, unbelief and superstition reach their worst excesses in Christian living. They strive to assert themselves with regard not only to the possibility, but also to the reality of faith. It ought not to be, it must not be, that Christians, though free from the power of sin, sin and become Adam again. However, it is a fact. Christians are *de facto* the old Adam and Eve.<sup>493</sup>

Furthermore, because the sin of faithlessness pervades all human existence it is impossible to separate and dissect artificially the sin of the human (i.e., the religious human apart from the empirical phenomena of religion, especially the Christian religion). According to Barth the

wrong [of the human] does not exist merely *in abstracto* but in the act and therefore in the heart of man. Man gives to it the nature and form which it could not have of itself, since it is not the creation of God. He gives to it a place and actuality in the created world to which it does not belong, in which there is no category of its possibility. Man is the dark corner where wrong can settle and spread and flourish in all its nothingness as though by right.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> CD IV/1, 535.

<sup>493</sup> Jüngel, *Justification*, 135-136.

Consequently, in the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification, God not only reckons with the sin of faithlessness but ultimately with the human who actualizes this sin. Only in the inseparable unity of sin and sinner can one see that the Christian religion, even as the true religion, is still thoroughly faithless. Barth's discussion of mysticism and its parasitic relation to religion in general and the Christian religion in particular (cf. §17.2) are brought back to mind when Jüngel argues that the Christian religion's

chief characteristic is that it claims not to contradict the truth of God's Word but to match it. In the Christian form of unbelief and superstition, sin makes its most blatant contradiction of the truth of the gospel by embracing and even kissing the truth, as Judas did with his Lord. Christians betray the truth of the faith when they domesticate and make it harmless by embracing it.<sup>495</sup>

The faithlessness of the Christian religion is no different than the faithlessness of all other religions but it is most clearly revealed in light of God's justification of it. Indeed, the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ disrupts and destroys the Christian religion's attempts to create, elect, and, justify (and sanctify) itself as the true religion and thereby reveals the Christian religion as faithless and utterly dependent upon God to justify it. According to G.C. Berkouwer, "Justification does not weaken the confession of guilt, it elicits it. This is not pessimistic self-accusation which continues to view one's own sin without comfort, but it is correlative to justification which is an act of God's righteousness and therein an act of His grace."<sup>496</sup>

Even though the Christian religion is guilty of faithlessness there is the corresponding positive and victorious revelation that God is just in justifying the

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<sup>494</sup> CD IV/1, 539.

<sup>495</sup> Jüngel, *Justification*, 136. Cf. CD I/2, 319-320.

<sup>496</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1956), 145.

Christian religion because he is also its creator and elector (and sanctifier) as revealed in Jesus Christ. According to Barth,

We are simply pointing to the most obvious aspect when we say that in the justification of man we have to do with the expression of God's right as Creator; His right to man as His creature, a creature which does not belong to itself or to anyone else but God, which as His exclusive handiwork is also His exclusive possession. This right of God is compromised by sin, by the existence of man as the man of sin, by the fact of his pride and fall. We have described this as the invasion by chaos of the cosmos of God's creating, as the blot on His creation.<sup>497</sup>

Just as "the Nothingness" invades and corrupts God's good creation, so too it manifests as a distorting and destroying force as seen in religion, especially the Christian religion; and yet, for Barth, God is justified in creating this creation, which includes his divine creation of the Christian religion into the true religion, in spite the fact creation is pervaded by "the Nothingness," which manifests particularly in religious faithlessness. According to Barth,

The justification of man is plainly God's decision that this claim [of "the Nothingness" and faithlessness] is empty, that this invasion and blot is impossible and intolerable, that it cannot be suffered. It is God's contradiction of the contradiction raised against Himself. For this reason it is an act of judgment, an act of judgment which aims to destroy the wrong of man and positively to re-establish the right of God. As that history, that transition, that *mortificatio* and *vivificatio*, it proves that God takes sin seriously as the compromising of His right as Creator, that He is not willing by one hair's breadth to forego His right on face of it.<sup>498</sup>

The power by which God negates "the Nothingness" in his creation is irresistible as Barth alludes to the first creation narrative of Genesis wherein God creates light, against which darkness emerges, and then permanently separates them. Barth further argues that God "beats back and beats down the assault upon His right to man, the attempt upon His right and creation. He does so with all the radicalness and totality with which this is done in the justification of man. In so doing, He justifies in the

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<sup>497</sup> CD IV/1, 562.

<sup>498</sup> CD IV/1, 562.



first instance Himself as the Creator of man, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.”<sup>499</sup> God, however, did not arbitrarily create this creation because before he created he elected to be the God who would eternally be with and for his creation in Jesus Christ. Hence, God’s justification of the sinner is determined by his prior and eternal choice to be reconciled with his creation even though it has and still forfeits its fellowship with God by cavorting with “the Nothingness.” Barth declares that,

Man is not merely [God’s] handiwork and possession. Beyond that—in answer to the call of God—he is His covenant-partner, who has not merely been given existence, but who is appointed to salvation, to whose existence He has given the end of eternal life, i.e., of fellowship with Himself in the form of service to Him. Man is the elect creature of God. God’s right to him is therefore the right of His gracious election.<sup>500</sup>

God creates and justifies because he elected to do so, which not only occurs for the individual Christian but also for the Christian religion. Thus, Barth’s argument of the justification of the sinner is commensurate with his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification when he states that the

justification of unrighteous man shows that God does not accept this rejecting and despising of His grace. It is the intervention of God against it in judgment, His intervention for the right of His grace. The man who sets [h]imself in the wrong against it must die as a wrongdoer, but [h]e must rise again as the recipient of the right of the elect, of the covenant-partner of God, which is granted to [h]im.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> CD IV/1, 562-563.

<sup>500</sup> CD IV/1, 563. It must be remembered that Barth discusses the relationship between creation and justification *before* the relationship between election and justification, meaning there is a certain formal (but not material) fluidity over whether to begin with creation or election and their relationship to other doctrines.

<sup>501</sup> CD IV/1, 563. The translation incorrectly uses the uppercase “H” which would refer to God and not a human necessitating it being changed to the lowercase “h.” See KD IV/1, 628, which reads: “Des ungerechten Menschen Rechtfertigung zeigt, daß er sich diese Zurückweisung und Verhöhnung seiner Gnade nicht bieten läßt. Sie ist Gottes richterliches Einschreiten dagegen und also für das Recht seiner Gnade. Der Mensch, der sich gegen sie ins Unrecht setzt, muß als dessen Täter sterben, aber auch neu werden als Empfänger eben des ihm zugedachten Rechtes des Erwählten, des Bundespartners Gottes.”

Barth's doctrine of justification is determined by his doctrine of election, which is why it is necessary to understand why election is crucial for Barth, because even though the human has been chosen for fellowship with God in and for eternity, she must still be justified because she has succumbed to "the Nothingness" as evidenced in her (religious) faithlessness. McCormack argues that, for Barth,

What happens in the covenant of grace and the divine election that comes to expression in it is that God chooses to be God in a covenant with *sinful man*. Not the "neutral" human who lives in a paradisiacal situation but the sinful human [who] is the object of God's electing grace. But because this is so, God had to address the problem of sin and the sinner already in the covenant itself. This God did by choosing reprobation for himself and mercy for us. In Jesus Christ, God chose to be the God who would suffer and die in reprobation. And in Jesus Christ, God determined that we sinners would be the beneficiaries of a restored covenantal relation.<sup>502</sup>

The next subsection of §61.3 ("The Pardon of Man") is the heart of Barth's doctrine of justification, particularly as it pertains to the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification. As was demonstrated earlier (§17.3), Barth understands the justification of the Christian religion as the forgiveness of its sin of faithlessness in the name of Jesus Christ, and in his mature treatment of justification, especially this subsection, Barth believes his previous subsection on the judgment of God has its goal in the pardon of the ungodly. Barth states that, "In the judgment of God, according to His election and rejection, there is made in the midst of time, and as the central event of all human history, referring to all the men who live both before and after, a decision, a divisive sentence. Its result—expressed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—is the pardon of man."<sup>503</sup> Thus, it is not surprising Barth's doctrine of justification moves irreversibly from God to the sinful human because he desires not to posit an ideal notion of divine justification that only

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<sup>502</sup> McCormack, *Justitia aliena*, 191. Author's emphasis.

<sup>503</sup> CD IV/1, 568.

concerns God and/or only understands the sinful human as conceptually forgiven.

Gunton contends that, “Barth fought a lifelong battle against what he called abstraction: the treatment of any topic out of relation to the fact that the divine action which provides the basis and possibility of theology is action in relation to the world.”<sup>504</sup> However, inasmuch as Barth desires to uphold the reconciliation between the just God and the sinful human he also points out the necessary divine division of the sinful human from themselves as the just human. Jüngel concurs with Barth when he argues that, “We have not understood our justification until we see it as a fundamental interruption of our own life context and see Jesus Christ as being this fundamental interruption. We must see this interruption as having the goal of making ungodly people into those in *concord* with God.”<sup>505</sup>

By way of reminder one will recall the principle analogy for Barth’s understanding of the Christian religion as “The True Religion” in §17.3 is the *simul iustus et peccator*. For Barth, just as there are justified sinners so too is there a true religion (i.e., the Christian religion), and just as the justified sinner is wholly sinful and wholly just so too is the Christian religion wholly faithless and wholly faithful. Furthermore, Barth believes the Christian religion always *becomes* the true religion meaning that even though it is always simultaneously sinful and just this side of the eschaton, nevertheless, it is in a continual and irreversible transition from being faithless to being faithful. Therefore, it will be demonstrated how Barth’s exposition of the *simul* in §61.3 provides further elucidation to his doctrine of the Christian religion as the true religion in §17.3. As a final remark Hunsinger’s definition of the *simul* is adopted when he states that,

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<sup>504</sup> Gunton, “Salvation,” 143.

<sup>505</sup> Jüngel, *Justification*, 81. Author’s emphasis.

The great doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator* describes a *totus/totus* relation. The baptized believer who is still completely a sinner is also [at] the same time completely righteous in Christ. The relationship between the two predications is not static, as in a frozen paradox, but eschatological. *Peccator* refers to the old sinful humanity. It lives on in the present as the past that was crucified with Christ. *Iustus* refers to the new redeemed humanity. It breaks in on the present continually as the future that was [raised] with Christ. The Christian life is a constant turning from the past to the future, from oneself as a sinner to oneself as righteous, in the form of a constant turning to Christ – who exchanged his righteousness for our sin, that we might exchange our sin for his righteousness. We participate in this great exchange once for all through faith, and thereafter continually again and again, and always *totus/totus*, not *partim/partim* (or more precisely, the latter always only in the context of the former).<sup>506</sup>

The aspect Barth draws out of the *simul* is its historicity and the reason he so strongly emphasizes the historicity of the justification of the sinful human is because he “actualizes” the doctrine, which is his unique way of eschewing the classical theological understanding of justification as a paradoxical state of two static “natures.” Hence, he reconstructs the doctrine of justification as a dialectical movement and historical event of the whole human from a completely hopeless past towards a thoroughly justified future. Barth argues that,

The man who is justified and therefore pardoned by God is the man in whom it comes to pass that he is separated from that past. This happens in every present in such a way that he is found by God in that past. God meets him as the doctor coming to the sick and not the whole, as the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to seek the lost, as the father who stretches out his arms to the son who has gone into the far country and orders for him the fatted calf, as the Saviour who sits down to meat with publicans and sinners. Justification begins as man’s acquittal from sin, from his being as a sinner.<sup>507</sup>

When Barth actualizes the *simul* he does not believe the human’s sin is not as evil and the righteousness of God not as gracious relative to the Thomist view where grace merely perfects nature; nor does he believe the justified sinner becomes, by

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<sup>506</sup> George Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin and Barth,” *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 18/3 (2002): 325.

<sup>507</sup> CD IV/1, 574.

degree and not kind, more just and less sinful as they progress through the Christian life. Rather Barth contends that,

The divine pardon does not burst into man's willingness but his unwillingness. Man will always be a miracle and a puzzle to himself as he breaks out in this way. He will never find in himself any reason for doing so. He will not be of the opinion that he has made even the slightest contribution to it. He will rather confess freely and frankly that his own contribution is only his own great corruption, in which without any co-operation or merit of his own he is found by the divine pardon—not in his self-judgment but in the judgment of God—reached and converted to God and set on the way to his right and life.<sup>508</sup>

Barth's reconstruction of the *simul* combines the quantitative (*totus peccator et totus iustus*) and the qualitative (*peccator homo fit iustus homo*) without confusing the two because, for him, "Neither in the one case nor in the other are we dealing with a quantum, rising here and dropping there like a fluid in two communicating tubes, but in both cases we are dealing with a single and a total human existence."<sup>509</sup>

Moreover, the twofold reality of a human existing as *simul iustus et peccator* is not, for Barth, a contradiction as both realities are held in dialectical tension for, according to Paul Nimmo, "The dialectic lies in the fact that the individual is thus associated with two *apparently* contradictory predicates at the same time."<sup>510</sup> The contradiction is only apparent because the sinful human participates in the twofold reality of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected thereby giving her an irrevocable and irreversible determination wherein she currently and continually transitions from being sinful to being just. Barth clarifies by stating that,

The dialectic of justification is not that of a to and fro, or an up and down, but at every present it is that of a history in which the wrong of the justified man is (in

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<sup>508</sup> CD IV/1, 576.

<sup>509</sup> CD IV/1, 576.

<sup>510</sup> Paul Nimmo, "Reforming *simul iustus et peccator*: Karl Barth and the 'Actualisation' of the Doctrine of Justification," *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* Supplement Series 6, (Forthcoming): 92. Emphasis mine.

all its reality) behind him and his right before him, in which, therefore, he can have his future only in the movement to his right and his past only in his wrong (in all its reality), in which he can be only on the way from there to here, because that and that alone corresponds to the positive will of God.<sup>511</sup>

Just as the individual Christian exists in this continual movement from sinful to righteous so too the Christian religion moves from faithlessness to faithfulness even though it wholly remains a religion. Hence, the following quote from Barth is applicable not only to the individual Christian but also to the Christian religion when he states that,

The justification of man as determined and accomplished and pronounced in the divine sentence is both at once in this order and sequence: it is *creatio ex contrario*, but *creatio*; *iustificatio impii*, but *iustificatio*. The grace of God, as it is addressed and comes to the sinful man who has fallen away from Him and resists Him in his pride, is free grace, sovereign, unmerited, miraculous, but valid and effective. In the sentence of God as His repudiation and promise the old man is already the new man, the unfaithful covenant-partner the faithful [*der ungetreue schon der getreue Bundespartner*], the one who has set himself in the wrong the one who is set in the right, the dead raised again and alive.<sup>512</sup>

It is necessary to keep in mind that Barth's upholding and yet reconstruction of the *simul iustus et peccator* does not dilute the sovereign judgment of God in the justification and pardon of the sinful human; rather, he radicalizes the sinful human's justification and pardon precisely because God chose, in the election of Jesus Christ, to justify the sinner in him in every moment of her creaturely existence in spite of her sin. Nimmo is correct when he states that, "Central to this doctrine, then, is an understanding of human being as an existence in transition, from sin and death and wrath to righteousness and life and mercy."<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> CD IV/1, 592.

<sup>512</sup> CD IV/1, 592-593; KD IV/1, 661.

<sup>513</sup> Nimmo, "Reforming *simul iustus et peccator*," 92.

Having established Barth's adopting and adapting of the *simul iustus et peccator* both aspects of the *simul* will now be explored in turn. Beginning first with the *peccator* Barth insists that even though the sinful human moves away from her past as a sinner she is not wholly free from her sin; and similarly even though the Christian religion has been declared the true religion it must still be continually sublimated (in this case – justified). The justified sinner in particular and the Christian religion in general move towards their final and total justification in the eschaton as temporal penitents continually confessing their guilt of faithlessness. According to Barth,

True penitence will show itself as such in the fact that man will not rest in what he was and still is and has to accept and confess, but will resolutely turn to what he will be and already is. In true penitence man makes in simple obedience the turning for which he is pronounced free in the justifying sentence of God, which is therefore both legitimate and possible.<sup>514</sup>

In fact, Barth concludes that the “man who will not recognize that he is a justified sinner is just as disobedient, and more so, than the man who tries to deny that only as a sinner is he justified.”<sup>515</sup> How the justification of the individual applies to the Christian religion is no different as it is simply actualized on a larger scale but does not diminish the seriousness of its sin and God's forgiveness of it. Jüngel argues that, “Believers are people who know that they are sinners because they allow their sins to be forgiven. They make the claim that they are the people who are justified and recognized by God. That is the highest claim it is possible for a human community to make about itself.”<sup>516</sup> And yet the individual Christian and the Christian religion cannot take pride in their respective boasting of being forgiven

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<sup>514</sup> CD IV/1, 594.

<sup>515</sup> CD IV/1, 594.

<sup>516</sup> Jüngel, *Justification*, 222.

sinners in abstraction from the God who justifies and pardons the individual's sin of pride and its communal sin of faithlessness. In fact, for the individual and community to know they are *totus peccator* in relation to the God of Jesus Christ is simultaneously liberating and enslaving. Nimmo contends that,

On the one hand, her sin – her existence as sinner, even – is annihilated in the history of Jesus Christ. Her wrong always lies behind her, and is always something away from which she must begin again to be in motion. On the other hand, her sin – her existence as sinner, also – continues in her own history, in which she continues to defy her true history in Jesus Christ in an act of inexplicable and impossible wilfulness.<sup>517</sup>

Therefore, even though the individual Christian and the Christian religion are completely justified by faith, they are still totally sinful and sinners; and even though they know their sinful past has been mortified in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ their sin of faithlessness still episodically and frequently manifests. Nimmo further states that, “It is only in her own, false, history that the *totus peccator* label has any traction – as indicating the persistent yet irrational and incomprehensible irruption of yesterday into today. And this false history is always something that is in [the] process of being left behind in the life of the individual.”<sup>518</sup> Thankfully this is not the entirety of the individual Christian and her religion in their history as faithless sinners because this history has been and is sublimated in the history of Jesus Christ.

Barth's understanding of the *iustus* will now be discussed, which can neither be understood apart from nor in submission to the *peccator*. Barth believes a Christian and the Christian religion are completely just but this does not mean they are only just due to the fact they have not yet shed their being as *homo et ecclesia peccator*. Before arguing for the *iustus* of the *simul* Barth declares that,

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<sup>517</sup> Nimmo, “Reforming *simul iustus et peccator*,” 96.

<sup>518</sup> Nimmo, “Reforming *simul iustus et peccator*,” 97.



The only thing is that as long as [the sinner] lives in time and considers his own person, he is both together: *simul peccator et iustus*, yet not half *peccator* and half *iustus*, but both altogether. And the pardon of man, declared in the promise concerning him, the reality of his future already in the present, is no less than this: *totus iustus*.<sup>519</sup>

At this point in Barth's argument the nomenclature employed in §17.3 for the divine justification of the Christian religion as the "forgiveness of sins" emerges most strongly when he argues for the *iustus* of the Christian. According to Nimmo,

In its prospective aspect, the divine act of justification opens up for sinful humanity a future vista of unqualified affirmation and promise that is yet to be completely or unambiguously realised. At the same time, in light of the history of Jesus Christ, Barth affirms that the content of this affirmation and promise is in some wise already present for the individual.<sup>520</sup>

What one sees in Barth's argument for the *totus iustus* of the Christian is the promise given but not fully possessed, a reality declared but not fully realized. Barth states that the sinful human

can have forgiveness of sins only as he receives it from God, as God gives it to him. There can be no question of any other receiving, or having, or possessing of forgiveness, of any other certainty concerning it. This is all true as the act of God takes place for him, as the gift of God is recognised and taken by him. The content of the promise is that God wills to do and will do this act for him, that he can recognise and take this gift. To receive the forgiveness of sins means, therefore, to receive the promise of the forgiveness of sins. To have the forgiveness of sins means to hold to the promise, to look forward with confidence in it, to go forward obediently to its direction. To be certain of the forgiveness of sins means finally not to doubt the promise of it as such for its own sake. If he looks behind him, or into the depth of his present as determined by his past, man can never receive or enjoy the comfort of the forgiveness of sins; he cannot have it. He has it only as it comes to him in the promise, not otherwise.<sup>521</sup>

The present-future reality the *iustus* of the Christian, however, does not allow her to forget conveniently the prior (and even current) history of being *peccator* but

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<sup>519</sup> CD IV/1, 596.

<sup>520</sup> Nimmo, "Reforming *simul iustus et peccator*," 97.

<sup>521</sup> CD IV/1, 596.

establishes the fact God has and continually forgives her by acknowledging her past but not allowing it to thwart or determine her present and future. Barth states that,

Forgiveness obviously does not mean to make what has happened not to have happened. Nothing that has happened can ever not have happened. The man in whose life what had happened came not to have happened would not be the same man. He is the man in the totality of his history. He stands before God and is known to Him as this man. The man who receives forgiveness does not cease to be the man whose past (and his present as it derives from his past) bears the stain of his sins. The act of the divine forgiveness is that God sees and knows this stain infinitely better than the man himself, and abhors it infinitely more than he does even in his deepest penitence—yet He does not take it into consideration, He overlooks it, He covers it, He passes it by, He puts it behind Him, He does not charge it to man, He does not “impute” it (2 Cor. 5<sup>19</sup>), He does not sustain the accusation to which man has exposed himself, He does not press the debt with which he has burdened himself, He does not allow to take place the destruction to which he has inevitably fallen victim.<sup>522</sup>

Furthermore, Barth is concerned not to allow any nominalism to influence the re-creative power of the divine forgiveness of sins. Whereas the traditional Protestant argument for the justification of the sinner could be interpreted as a “legal fiction,” wherein the sinner is merely declared by God as just but in their concrete reality still remains a sinner, Barth argues that God has, does, and will re-create the sinful human into a just human. Barth declares,

As pardoning, it is the effectual and righteous alteration of the human situation from its very foundation. If God’s sentence concerning man is that He will know nothing of this stain, then the stain is washed away and removed, and although man still bears it, in spite of his wrong he is in the right. The divine pardoning is not a remission “as if” man were not a sinner. As pardoning, it is the creative work of God, in the power of which man, even as the old man that he was and still is, is no longer that man, but is already another man, the man he will be, the new man. That is the forgiveness of sins as the final stroke under man’s past.<sup>523</sup>

As mentioned earlier Barth brings his doctrines of creation and election to bear upon his doctrine of justification and he utilizes these doctrines in his argument for the justification of the sinner to strengthen the argument that the sinful human is not only

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<sup>522</sup> CD IV/1, 597.

<sup>523</sup> CD IV/1, 597.

affirmed as an elect creature of God but also becomes a child of God as adopted through faith in Jesus Christ. Barth states that,

It is not merely the restored right of the creature and the covenant-partner; according to the New Testament witness, it is the right of the child of God. In spite of his sin man is justified by God and before God not merely in the sense that God confirms and maintains him as His creature and covenant-partner, but in the sense that He receives him into His house, that He accepts and addresses and treats him as essentially His.<sup>524</sup>

The repeatedly broken, covenantal relationship between humanity and God is eternally rectified in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in, through, and from whom the possibility exists for the estranged and alienated sinner to be adopted as a child of God. O'Grady argues that, for Barth, "It means that there is a kinship of being (*Seinsgemeinschaft*) between God and man, an ontological relationship (*eine ontologische Beziehung*). By adopting man as His child God binds Himself to man just as He has bound man to Himself. If God calls man His son then he *is* His son and God *is* his Father."<sup>525</sup> The final aspect of the *iustus*, for Barth, is its eschatological orientation and fulfillment. Justification is not only a temporal, present reality, as God will finally complete it in the eschaton. Nimmo states that the "event of justification that is the secret of the present life will in eternity be revealed to have been such all along, and the era of transition and contradiction will reach its end."<sup>526</sup> In fact, for Barth, the sinner not only believes she is presently justified in spite of her sin but also hopes that her current dialectical and transitory history will end in her total justification where the possibility of sinning and contradicting her justified status is an impossibility. Barth argues that one should

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<sup>524</sup> CD IV/1, 599.

<sup>525</sup> O'Grady, *The Church*, 226. Author's emphasis.

<sup>526</sup> Nimmo, "Reforming *simul iustus et peccator*," 99.

describe hope simply as the supreme form of the right of the children of God. We can also describe the whole state of the justified sinner as his state in hope, in so far as in the forgiveness of sins proclaimed to him, in the divine sonship ascribed to him, he has to do with the promise of God and therefore with that which he has to hope and expect from God.<sup>527</sup>

Although a justified sinner does not currently experience the full extent of the eschaton, she knows that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, she will be completely free from the possibility of sinning and totally justified. This does not mean the justified sinner will lose her humanity in the eschaton but that her transition from sinner to righteous will reach its goal. O’Grady remarks that the “justified man hopes for the *abolition* of the tension in which he now finds himself: the tension of his simultaneous past and future, sinfulness and righteousness, the tension of his constant transition from one to the other.”<sup>528</sup> Consequently, the justified sinner can only and truly hope that she is and will be *totus iustus*. Barth summarizes the hope of the sinner’s eventual and total justification by stating that,

In the hope in which man’s justification is fulfilled it is not merely a matter of the looking and reaching out for the promised forgiveness of sins and divine sonship which has to be new every day and every hour. It is a matter of that. But it is clear that hoping for it as such implies a looking and reaching out for a goal at which the state of the justified man as indicated by the forgiveness of sins and divine sonship, although not different, will be revealed and shown and will work itself out in a different way from anything that can or will ever take place on his pilgrimage from an ever new past through an ever new present to an ever new future, in his movement, his history, in time. His justification takes place in the temporal course of this history, and everything that he is and does as justified by God is only in this transition. It is genuine and complete, but contradictory, concealed under this contradiction. It is only in the being together of that which is antithetical, in the form of a riddle, in the mystery of the *simul peccator et iustus*.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> CD IV/1, 601.

<sup>528</sup> O’Grady, *The Church*, 227. Emphasis mine. Although the term “sublimation” is preferred, O’Grady is correct that, in the eschaton, the tension of the Christian life, individually and ecclesiastically, will dissolve giving way to total justification for the individuals who comprise the communion of saints.

<sup>529</sup> CD IV/1, 602.

For Barth this means the justified sinner, like the Christian religion, is not temporally or eternally locked in a “vicious circle” in which they remain a perpetual paradox to themselves, others, and God; rather, in Jesus Christ, the justified sinner “knows that he is not caught up in a futile vacillation or movement in a circle. He lives in the constant differentiation of his future from his past, his right from his wrong, his life from his death.”<sup>530</sup> Even more so Barth believes, in the eschaton, the justified sinner will be ontologically righteous when he states that, “According to the strong expression of 2 Cor. 5<sup>21</sup>, he will have become the righteousness of God.”<sup>531</sup> The sinful human, who is alienated from God because of her pride, is and will be justified by God in spite of her sin; likewise the Christian religion, which is faithless to God, will be forgiven its sin and fully become the true religion. Both will become righteous before God in the eschaton even though they currently know and experience this only by faith in the God of Jesus Christ. Nimmo concludes that,

The individual does not simply oscillate between the now and the not yet of justification, but rather finds herself constantly in movement from the former towards the latter as she receives and as she believes the promise of God. And it is precisely in that faith that her future becomes her present, that the promise of God is fulfilled in time and that the fullness of justification is already received by her in anticipation of her eternal life to come.<sup>532</sup>

The final section of Barth’s doctrine of justification, §61.4 (“Justification by Faith Alone”), is a discussion on the role of faith in relation to the already-but-not-yet-complete realisation of the forgiveness of the sinner. Barth begins this section with numerous rhetorical questions by which to distinguish the uniqueness of the Christian understanding of the justification of the sinner by faith alone from the

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<sup>530</sup> CD IV/1, 602.

<sup>531</sup> CD IV/1, 603.

<sup>532</sup> Nimmo, “Reforming *simul iustus et peccator*,” 100.

plethora of contrary understandings of how the human tries to justify her existence before others and God. Barth eventually declares that, “We ourselves do not accept the view that the man justified by God is an idea, an ideal construction, a myth, an illusion. But if this is not to be a mere opinion, as against which we might equally well be of a different opinion, we must consider closely the grounds on which we have to adopt it.”<sup>533</sup> The ground upon which Barth attempts to establish his innovative understanding of the justification of the sinner by faith alone is Jesus Christ; but before he can demonstrate that he must cut off any possibilities for the sinner to think her faith is a possession she uses to complement the work of Jesus Christ in justifying her before God. Barth states that,

The existence of the justified man proves and maintains and establishes itself as real to itself with sovereign power. It is more real than all human conceptions of history both secular and ecclesiastical. But while this is true, we can never master it, we can never control it, we can never avail ourselves of it, we can never use it, we can never make anything of it.<sup>534</sup>

Barth further enlarges the impossible possibility of the sinner possessing justifying faith to include religion, which obviously includes the Christian religion. Having lived and ministered in late European Christendom, Barth knew well the temptation for the justified sinner and her religious tradition to point to its traditions and liturgical practices, which is why he argues that,

No one is [justified] by nature. No one is on the basis of a religious disposition. No one is because he lives in and by a definite cultural or ecclesiastical tradition and the stimuli and forces of that tradition. No one is because he receives the sacraments, or is a genius, or a brave man, or baptised—even as a believer—or converted, or a passably good Christian. No one.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> *CD IV/1*, 611.

<sup>534</sup> *CD IV/1*, 612.

<sup>535</sup> *CD IV/1*, 613.

Therefore, the possibility of the justified sinner boasting in her faith is as impossible as the Christian religion boasting in its exclusive sublimation because both realities (i.e., faith and sublimation) are neither possessed by the justified sinner nor the Christian religion meaning they cannot justify themselves before other sinful humans, religions, and especially God.

After Barth discusses the negative aspect of the justification of the sinner by faith alone he then argues for its positive aspect. Barth defines justifying faith as “the absolutely humble but absolutely positive answer to the question of the reality and existence of the man justified by God, to the question who and where this man is.”<sup>536</sup> Faith, for Barth, is humility and the justified sinner must be faithfully humble if she is to testify to herself, others, and God that she is justified in spite of her sins. Because humility is the evidence of faith it presupposes the justified sinner has been and is continually humbled, as she continually believes in the God who justifies her. Barth further argues how the justified sinner still struggles with bouts of arrogance and faithlessness even though she is also faithful and justified. Barth states that,

even in the believer we have to do with very vain-glorious man. The only thing is that—although he still exercises vain-glory—he has acquired a distaste, a radical and total distaste for it. The only thing is that he cannot find any more pleasure in what he does as vain-glorious man, that he despairs of himself as this man. He no longer expects anything of what he does as such. He sees the corruption of his utterly proud action. He sees that he will not attain what he continually hopes from it. He sees into what trouble it is bringing him, that at the end of all his vain-glorious ways—the vain-glorious ways of all men—disillusionment awaits him, ridicule, defeat, meaninglessness, indeed nonsense and contradiction, destruction, nothingness and death. He is under no misapprehension as to the fact that he still goes these ways, with their ever new and concealed turnings. The only thing is that now he cannot affirm and approve them, he cannot affirm and approve himself as he goes [to] them.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> *CD IV/1*, 614.

<sup>537</sup> *CD IV/1*, 619.

The humble faith of the justified sinner testifies to her justification before God and yet her humility is not only a passive acknowledgement of God's justifying act, as the humility of faith is also actively testified to in the Christian's obedience to God.

Barth critically adopts and adapts the *sola fide* as a purely passive reality in order to reclaim the necessary aspect of active obedience so the justified sinner can rightly claim she is justified by faith. According to Barth, "Faith differs from any mere thinking and believing and knowing, or indeed from any other trusting, in the fact that it is an obeying. For that reason its humility is neither a matter of our choice nor of an outward compulsion. It is a free decision, but made with the genuine necessity of obedience."<sup>538</sup> For Barth, humility is obedience but not a meritorious righteousness; rather, the obedience (i.e., "works") of the Christian testifies that her works are not meritorious. Barth believes the justified sinner "lives as one who is righteous by faith to the exclusion of all works [and] is something that he will establish and attest in his works—the particular doctrine of justification that we find in the Epistle of James."<sup>539</sup> Faith, as the "work" of the Christian, can and never will merit the sinner's justification before God as it corresponds to the work of God in Jesus Christ who reveals his faithfulness in spite of and in contradiction to the faithlessness of his creatures; moreover this faith, as the non-meritorious "work" of the Christian, takes the form of imitation, particularly and exclusively the imitation of Jesus Christ. O'Grady contends that, for Barth,

Justifying faith is a concrete correspondence to the One in whom it believes. It is the subjective 'realization' (in the sense of knowledge) of justification which corresponds to its objective realization. As such it cannot be but the humility of

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<sup>538</sup> CD IV/1, 620.

<sup>539</sup> CD IV/1, 627. See also the discussion of §66.5 in chapter 5.



obedience and the obedience of humility. And as such it is an *imitatio Christi*, an analogy to the attitude and action of Jesus Christ.<sup>540</sup>

What this imitation does not call for, according to Barth, is a pious self-abnegation in which the justified sinner plunges herself into a mystical, anti-noetic darkness or even a grotesque mimicry of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Barth argues that,

If faith in its negative form is indeed an emptying, then it is certainly an emptying of all the results of such practices of self-emptying. It begins at the point where all the works of man are at an end, including his quiescence and silence and anticipatory dying. Christian faith is the day whose dawning means the end of the mystical night.<sup>541</sup>

The positive aspect of faith as humble obedience is of most importance for Barth and Küng summarizes his position stating that,

Faith is not imitatio Christi, insofar as man does not justify himself; yet it is imitatio Christi in one true sense: it is an imitatio Dei inasmuch as trustful faith (πίστις) is the appropriate counterpart to the fidelity (πίστις) of God as actualized and revealed in His judgment and verdict, and it is particularly an imitatio Christi insofar as the obedience of humility is a true reflection of divine condescension, a human re-enactment, a human mimesis and imitation. Not as if this human re-enactment itself justifies man, since all of this is merely *man's* doing, yet without this re-enactment faith would not be justifying faith, and would not be a concrete response to Christ.<sup>542</sup>

The final aspect of Barth's argument for the justification of the sinful human by faith is its participatory mode. Here Barth's Christocentric emphasis emerges most clearly, because in Jesus Christ the sinful human's faith is grounded and fostered. Barth states that justifying faith

comes about where Jesus Christ prevails on man, and in Jesus Christ the self-demonstration of the justified man. Faith knows Him and apprehends Him. It lets itself be told and accepts the fact and trusts in it that Jesus Christ is man's justification. It affirms and receives the fact that He is for us, that our redemptive history—that of all men and every man—has taken place.<sup>543</sup>

<sup>540</sup> O'Grady, *The Church*, 232.

<sup>541</sup> *CD* IV/1, 629. One is reminded of Barth's critique of mysticism in §17.2.

<sup>542</sup> Küng, *Justification*, 77. Author's emphasis.

Thus, there is an irreversible order to the sinner's participation by faith in the gracious movement of Jesus Christ to the justified sinner. Hunsinger argues that,

Because of the prior operation of grace, Barth believes, our objective participation in Christ precedes [and determines] our active participation through faith. Jesus Christ is the one great inclusive human being. We are not outsiders to participation in Christ until we happen to become insiders by faith. We are rather all insiders by grace whether we recognize it or not. Faith does not transfer us from the outside to the inside, but rather enables us to see the staggering fact that by the prevenient grace of God we were inside without knowing it all along.<sup>544</sup>

This participation by faith in Jesus Christ, however, cannot be presumed upon, as the justified sinner must continually believe in order to be justified even though she remains a sinner. According to Barth, "Faith ceases to be faith, it becomes its opposite, unbelief [*Unglauben*], hating and despising God, rejection, the crucifying afresh of the One in whom He gave Himself for us, if it looks anywhere but to Him, if the believer tries to look at himself and to rely and trust on his own activity and accomplishment."<sup>545</sup> Yet this warning from Barth must not create any unnecessary anxiety for the justified sinner relative to her participation by faith in Jesus Christ but instead drive her and her fellow justified sinners continually back to Jesus Christ as the one who justifies them individually and communally. Even though faith is not a possession to be controlled and manipulated, it is continually given in every moment of divine self-revelation so that every justified sinner can rest assured, but not complacent, in Jesus Christ who justifies them. Barth declares that,

Faith means that at every moment and in every situation man can rely on the fact that the movement between God and man which has taken place in Jesus Christ has taken place in supreme reality for him and therefore in his movement. Faith means that man can have confidence in relation to this alien righteousness

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<sup>543</sup> *CD* IV/1, 631.

<sup>544</sup> Hunsinger, "A Tale of Two Simultaneities," 326.

<sup>545</sup> *CD* IV/1, 632; *KD* IV/1, 706.

fulfilled there in Jesus Christ with a twofold reference, to yesterday and to-morrow.<sup>546</sup>

With this reference to the justified sinner's past and future her present is not lost but established as the locus wherein God justifies her. McCormack states well that, "At no point is justification my secure possession or a predicate of my existence in this world. Justification is a completed action in Jesus Christ alone; in my history it is something that can only take place (present tense) in each new moment."<sup>547</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

Barth's doctrines of the justification of the sinner and the Christian religion have much theological continuity, particularly the themes of the justification of the sinner presupposing the prior justification of God and the justification of the sinner as the forgiveness/pardon of sins. Furthermore, the previously discussed doctrines of the creation and election of the Christian religion and their relation to its justification and the justification of the sinner also strongly align with and mutually reinforce Barth's overall argument for the exclusive sublimation of the Christian religion. Regarding Barth's understanding of the relationship of creation to justification Küng states that,

In the justification of man, God justifies Himself as the Creator of man and His covenant-Lord. He confirms and manifests His just right as *Creator*. He will not tolerate the chaotic intervention and blemish of sin in His creation. Man is His. Man remains His work and His possession. God has this right to him and will not allow this to be called in question.<sup>548</sup>

Moreover, because God's act of and claim over creation is not arbitrary, Barth argues God is just in justifying his sinful, religious creatures because he has elected and created them in Jesus Christ. Küng also states that, for Barth, "Man is God's

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<sup>546</sup> CD IV/1, 633.

<sup>547</sup> McCormack, "*Justitia aliena*," 194.

<sup>548</sup> Küng, *Justification*, 89. Author's emphasis.

covenant-partner, elected from eternity. God had a special right to this elected creature and He will not allow the pride of man to put this right in doubt. He will not have His covenant partner torn away from Him. He intervenes.”<sup>549</sup> Therefore, for Barth, the justification of the sinner and the Christian religion are intricately related to and dependent upon the acts of divine creation and election because, as God creates and elects to justify the individual sinner, which is the pardon of her sins, so also he creates and elects to sublimate the Christian religion as divine justification.

Although Barth’s mature doctrine of justification is determined by his mature doctrine of election this does not overturn his earlier argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine justification but better elucidates the ontic ground and noetic source for the justification of God in his justification of the sinner and the Christian religion. For Barth, in Jesus Christ God eternally covenants with and for his creation in spite of its faithlessness to him and justifies himself when he justifies the sinner and the Christian religion by faith alone. According to Küng, the Christian

take[s] his existence entirely from Jesus Christ, and trust firmly that the interchange between God and man which took place in Jesus Christ has in its fullest reality taken place for him, and that the alien justice of Jesus Christ has become his—has become man’s own justice. Thus in faith man finds himself truly justified through the forgiveness of sins, finds himself as a child of God, finds himself as an heir of the hope of everlasting life.<sup>550</sup>

Even though the act of divine justification is the apex of Barth’s four “aspects” of the sublimation of the Christian religion it is not the final one; therefore, this thesis must turn to the fourth and final “aspect” of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification to show that the goal of its creation, election, and justification is its sanctification as evidenced primarily in its proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

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<sup>549</sup> Küng, *Justification*, 89-90. It is noted that Küng begins with creation and then moves to election but with an understanding of creation as determined by election.

<sup>550</sup> Küng, *Justification*, 77.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE REDEMPTION OF RELIGION AS SANCTIFICATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this fifth and final chapter it will be argued that Barth's doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification positively relates to his mature doctrine of sanctification, particularly the theme of proclamation. The chapter begins with a discussion of the fourth "aspect" of §17.3, i.e., the divine sanctification by which God sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion and thereafter focuses most attentively on the motif of proclamation. After discussing sublimation as divine sanctification in §17.3 it proceeds to §66 and comments on it in light of the prior exposition of §17.3. It will be shown that, for Barth, just as the Christian is *simul iustus et peccator* regarding her justification, so too is the Christian *simul sanctus et peccator* regarding her sanctification. Next, it will prove how the event of participation elucidates the relationship of Jesus Christ the Holy One and his saints as discipleship. After that Barth's theology of conversion is discussed, which is once for all and continual as the Christian has been and is continually converted because of her continual sin. In the penultimate section of §66.5 ("The Praise of Works") it will be argued that Barth's treatment of the praiseworthy nature of Christian works has the most continuity with his doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification, particularly in the event of proclamation. In the final section Barth's theology of the cross relative to the Christian life will be expounded because, even though the Christian is being sanctified, this does not entail a theology of glory and posture of superiority towards other humans but one of cruciformity and humility. The conclusion is a discussion on how Barth's doctrine of sanctification in §66 is further complemented by his discussion of "The True Church" in §67.1.

## **THE SUBLIMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AS SANCTIFICATION**

The final “act” by which God, in the name of Jesus Christ, sublimates the Christian religion into the true religion is sanctification. In §17.3 divine sanctification is the more positive “aspect” of the sublimation of the Christian religion in which Barth argues that proclamation is the chief evidence of the Christian’s religion sanctification into the true religion. However, before Barth demonstrates how and to what end the Christian religion is sanctified he recapitulates *in nuce* his argument for the justification of the Christian religion and its relationship to its sanctification.

Barth reiterates that,

We cannot try to find the justification of the Christian religion apart from the name of Jesus Christ in other facts, not even in the inward or outward state of justification of the Christian religion. Yet this justification of the Christian religion only by the name of Jesus Christ obviously involves a certain positive relation between the two. Christianity is differentiated from other religions by that name. It is formed and shaped by it. It is claimed for His service. It becomes the historical manifestation and means of its revelation.<sup>551</sup>

Cannon clarifies by stating that, “The positive aspect of justification must not be overlooked, the way in which Christianity is formally affected by the relationship it has with Jesus Christ, and becomes the instrument of revelation.”<sup>552</sup> And yet, for Barth, the justification of the Christian religion is not its ultimate goal because the purpose of the divine creation, election, and justification of the Christian religion is its sanctification, which is to proclaim Jesus Christ in whose name alone the Christian religion is sanctified. Barth declares that, “In the light of its justification and creation and election by the name of Jesus Christ, the fact that it is the Christian religion and not another cannot possibly be neutral or indifferent or without

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<sup>551</sup> CD I/2, 358. Barth also re-uses his sun-earth analogy, which was discussed and critiqued in chapter 4.

<sup>552</sup> Cannon, *The Concept of Religion*, 127.

significance. On the contrary, even though Christianity is a religion like others, it is significant and eloquent, a sign, a proclamation.”<sup>553</sup> Barth then provides an analogy, i.e., as the Word of God became flesh to witness for God to the world so the Christian religion witnesses to the world concerning the incarnate Word of God, who sublimates it, thus causing it to correspond to the incarnate Word of God by proclaiming its sanctification by him. Barth clarifies by stating that there

is an event on God’s side—which is the side of the incarnate Word of God—God adopting man and giving Himself to him. And corresponding to it there is a very definite event on man’s side. This event is determined by the Word of God. It has its being and form in the world of human religion. But it is different from everything else in this sphere and having this form.<sup>554</sup>

Here one sees Barth’s actualistic ontology determine his theology of the sanctification of the Christian religion because its sanctity is not an innate substance but a divinely initiated and fulfilled act that is continually given to it in the event of divine self-revelation. This why Barth contends that the

correspondence of the two events [i.e., the incarnation of the Word of God and the proclamation of it by the Christian religion] is the relationship between the name [of] Jesus Christ and the Christian religion from the standpoint of its sanctification. It is not by the laws and forces of human religion and therefore of man, but in virtue of the divine foundation and institution, that this particular being and form are an event in the world of human religion.<sup>555</sup>

Because the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification is continually given in its relationship with Jesus Christ it has, for Barth, definite limits which prevent it from falsely assuming it is a more holy religion than others and also

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<sup>553</sup> CD I/2, 358.

<sup>554</sup> CD I/2, 358.

<sup>555</sup> CD I/2, 358. For a more thorough treatment of Barth’s actualistic ontology see: Paul Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth’s Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 4-12; “Actualism,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth*, ed. Richard Burnett (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 1-3; Hunsinger, *How to Read*, 30-32.

empowers it to complete its divinely given task of proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

For Barth, the event of the sanctification of the Christian religion is one in which it

has simply to serve the name of Jesus Christ which alone justifies it. It can never—even incidentally—replace and suppress this name by its own substance. It can only attest it. It can only kindle and maintain the recollection and expectation of it. It can never claim to be itself the fact of God denoted by this name. It can only try to be its exhortatory and consoling sign. It can have a part in the truth only as it points to it and proclaims it. And in this pointing and proclaiming it can never have or claim any power or authority of its own.<sup>556</sup>

Barth further argues how the sanctification of the Christian religion is a once-for-all event and, therefore, a perpetual occurrence because God continually speaks his Word, meaning the Christian religion must continually hear, obey, and proclaim this Word. Just as the Christian religion is comprised of justified sinners so too are they sanctified sinners who must always reaffirm and re-acknowledge that only in the name of Jesus Christ can they testify why they comprise the true religion in contrast to all other religions. This is why Barth believes the Christian religion “is not justified because it is holy in itself—which it is not. It is made holy because it is justified. And it is not true because it is holy in itself—which it never was and never will be. But it is made holy in order to show that it is the true religion.”<sup>557</sup> Hence, Barth believes the sanctity of the Christian religion is perceptible and not opaque as God sanctifies it to be a holy sign that points to Jesus Christ in whose name it is sublimated. For Barth, “The Church and the children of God do actually exist. The actuality of their existence is quite unassuming, but it is always visible and in its visibility it is significant.”<sup>558</sup> Thus, the Christian religion is neither ahistorical nor ideal but historical and concrete even though one cannot point to its empirically

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<sup>556</sup> *CD* I/2, 358.

<sup>557</sup> *CD* I/2, 359.

<sup>558</sup> *CD* I/2, 359.



verifiable historicity and creatureliness as the source and ground of its sublimation as divine sanctification. And yet, the historical-material form and content of the Christian religion is of vital importance to Barth because he believes there is some empirical means by which the Christian religion can be distinguished as the true religion amongst all other religions. According to Barth,

we have to take seriously the fact that the Christian religion has a concrete historical nature and a concrete historical form: the distinction of that nature and form from those of other religions, the problems which arise concerning them, the possibility and danger of erring in respect of them and the need to make constant decision[s] in relation to them. The name of Jesus Christ is not only the justification but also the sanctification of the Christian religion.<sup>559</sup>

Cannon concurs when he states that, for Barth, “The practical consequence of sanctification means that such problems as nature and structure, theology and worship, are serious ones for Christianity. Their solution cannot determine its truth, but will instead indicate whether that truth is correctly perceived and understood.”<sup>560</sup>

As Barth concludes his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification he once more retrieves the paradigm of the *simul iustus et peccator* as the chief analogy by which he argues for the sublimation of the Christian religion. Barth is quoted at length to show how he sees the sanctification of the Christian religion as intricately tied to its justification when he states that,

The name of Jesus Christ justifies the Christian religion, without it being able to make even the slightest contribution to its justification as a human religion. This name is the authority and power which moves and transforms it in all its human sinfulness, continually erecting and maintaining a sign in this sphere, and seeing to it that it is observed. It is the authority and power which by this sign, by the sign of the Church, continually exhorts and consoles this religion throughout its history, being revealed not only in the past, but by means of this sign in the

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<sup>559</sup> CD I/2, 360. Barth does not engage in natural theology when he argues for the empirical verifiability of the sanctification of the Christian religion; rather, for Barth, the Christian religion’s proclamation of Jesus Christ is empirical and thus the evidence that it is the true religion for those who believe that God sublimates that religion to the exclusion of all others.

<sup>560</sup> Cannon, *The Concept of Religion*, 127.

present and future. It is perfectly true that Christians are sinners and that the Church is a Church of sinners. But if they are justified sinners—as Christians are—then in virtue of the same Word and Spirit which justifies them, they are also sanctified sinners.<sup>561</sup>

Ultimately, for Barth, the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification is evidenced in and determined by its proclamation of Jesus Christ because only when the Christian religion proclaims Jesus Christ, then it knows he sanctifies it. According to Barth,

It is not a question of acquiring and maintaining an advantage when Christians and Christianity seek the truth concerning the visible nature and form of their religion, suffer and fight for the truth when it is known. The fact remains that the highest results of their seeking, suffering and fighting do not give them any advantage. It all amounts to this, that as they have to keep on breathing for animal life [*animalischen Lebens*], so they have continually to struggle for their existence as Christians and Christianity, to be those who already have the advantage of knowing the name of Jesus Christ, and of being named after Him. It is a matter of the exercising and repeating of their existence as the Church and the children of God. They would not be what they are invisibly, if they were not so visibly and therefore in this exercise and repetition. But the sanctification, to which they are subject in this exercise and repetition, is quite beyond their own striving and its successes and failures. No less than their justification, it is the work of Him for whose sake they are called Christians and Christianity.<sup>562</sup>

It is now to §66 to argue how Barth's understanding of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification in §17.3 is better understood in the light of his mature doctrine of sanctification, particularly §66.5 ("The Praise of Works").

### **THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE HUMAN AND THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**

Just as Barth argued in §17.3 for the sublimation of the Christian religion as creation, election, and justification, so too he argues for its sublimation as sanctification. Its sanctification, however, does not occur in isolation from or in subservience to the other "aspects" but as their culmination. Barth's doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification in §17.3 and his mature doctrine of

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<sup>561</sup> *CD* I/2, 360.

<sup>562</sup> *CD* I/2, 361; *KD* I/2, 397.

sanctification in §66 both succeed his doctrine of justification because, for Barth, justification *theologically* precedes and determines sanctification. Even though, for Barth, justification precedes and determines sanctification this does not mean sanctification is of lesser importance in the event of the reconciliation of God with sinful humanity in Jesus Christ. In Johnson's evaluation of Barth's soteriology,

Justification and sanctification, therefore, are linked not as two successive activities or discrete stages in the Christian life but as two aspects of the one divine act of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Following the Chalcedonian pattern, these two moments can neither be confused nor separated, neither transformed into one another nor unduly contrasted.<sup>563</sup>

Just as Barth employs his actualized Chalcedonian Christology in his re-construction of his doctrine of justification in §61, he also uses it to re-construct his doctrine of sanctification. Daniel Migliore argues that,

Barth's case for the distinct but inseparable relationship of justification and sanctification is based on his interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology. Just as the person of Jesus Christ unites divine and human natures without confusion or separation, and just as divine self-humiliation and human exaltation, the event of the cross and the event of the resurrection, are distinguishable but inseparable moments of the one history of reconciliation in Jesus Christ, so also justification and sanctification are distinguishable but inseparable aspects of participation in Christ.<sup>564</sup>

Because Barth employs his actualized Chalcedonian Christology as the paradigm for understanding justification and sanctification as simultaneous, he thereby denies the traditional *ordo salutis* that sees sanctification temporally succeed justification.

Daniel Spross contends that, "Barth is especially concerned to stress that sanctification is not a work of God that [temporally] precedes or follows the work of justification; he views the entire work of God in reconciliation as unitary. Thus the reconciling work provided by Jesus Christ in His atonement accomplishes both the

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<sup>563</sup> Johnson, *The Mystery of God*, 140.

<sup>564</sup> Daniel Migliore, "Participatio Christi: The Central Theme of Barth's Doctrine of Sanctification," *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 18/3 (2002): 287.

justification and sanctification of man.”<sup>565</sup> In turning to §66.1 one sees Barth delineate and relate the justification and sanctification of the sinner without conflating and/or confusing the two.

Barth begins §66.1 (“Justification and Sanctification”) by pointing back to his revised Chalcedonian Christology as the determining reality of the atonement accomplished in Jesus Christ, specifically sanctification. Barth declares that,

The divine act of atonement accomplished and revealed in Jesus Christ does not consist only in the humiliation of God but in and with this in the exaltation of man. Thus it does not consist only in the fact that God offers Himself up for men; that He, the Judge, allows Himself to be judged in their place, in this way establishing and proclaiming among sinners, and in defiance of their sin, His divine right which is as such the basis of a new right of man before Him. It does not consist, therefore, only in the justification of man. It consists also in the sanctification which is indissolubly bound up with his justification, i.e., in the fact that as He turns to man in defiance of his sin He also, in defiance of his sin, turns to man to Himself.<sup>566</sup>

Burgess further argues that, for Barth, “What matters ultimately are not our *ideas* about justification and sanctification, but rather the *realities* to which they humbly point, namely, God’s justifying, sanctifying work for us and our salvation through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>567</sup> Hunsinger also believes Barth perceives in

the one life history of Jesus Christ as fulfilled in his cross, the humiliation of the eternal Son of God [that] had taken place for our justification in and with the exaltation of the earthly Son of man for our sanctification. Humiliation and exaltation were not two different stages of his life history, but two different aspects of it that had occurred continuously and simultaneously (in various ways) throughout its course from beginning to end.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> Daniel Spross, “The Doctrine of Sanctification in the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20/2 (1985): 63.

<sup>566</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 499. Hereafter *CD* IV/2.

<sup>569</sup> John Burgess, “Justification and Sanctification: Implications for Church Life Today,” in *What is Justification About? Reformed Contributions to an Ecumenical Theme*, eds. Michael Weinrich and John Burgess (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 87. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>568</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 329.

This means the justification and sanctification of the sinner is ontologically simultaneous because they correspond to and are determined by the simultaneous humiliation of the Son of God and exaltation of the Son of Man even though these realities are epistemologically grasped in historical succession. Hunsinger contends that, for Barth, the

appropriate mode of descriptive adequacy for the two countervailing aspects of this one reconciling occurrence [is] dialectical. It [is] not a matter of one truth in two parts, but of the whole truth of reconciliation coinhering simultaneously in two forms that [are] mutually necessary but also apparently diametrically opposite in operation and movement.”<sup>569</sup>

The dialectical history, movement, and event of the justification and sanctification of the sinner, however, is not found in her life-existence but only in Jesus Christ because, for Barth, it is only because of and in him that the sinner knows she is reconciled to God. Hunsinger argues that,

The simultaneity of justification and sanctification, Barth thinks, takes place at the level of our objective participation in Christ before it ever takes place at the level of our active participation. He thereby forcibly shifts the whole axis of salvation (justification and sanctification) away from what takes place in us existentially (*in nobis*) to what has taken place apart from us preveniently in Christ (*extra nos*).<sup>570</sup>

Moreover, the justification and sanctification of the sinner accomplished in the simultaneous humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ presupposes the totality of his person, which is his work. Therefore, justified and sanctified sinners cannot point only to one aspect of Jesus Christ to substantiate their justification and sanctification but must always be aware of the totality of Jesus Christ which is sufficient and necessary to understand their justification and sanctification in him. Regarding Barth’s view of the Christological determination of one’s justification Hunsinger contends that,

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<sup>569</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 329.

<sup>570</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 328.

Through our Lord's humiliation as the Son of God, and at the level of our universal objective participation in it, the great exchange took place whereby he assumed the full abysmal guilt and burden of human sin, even to the point of dying on the cross condemned in our place, in order that, by his sinless obedience, he might give us his perfect righteousness before God. This humiliation grounds and constitutes our justification.<sup>571</sup>

And yet, because the crucified Jesus was not left to decay but was resurrected by God, so too justified sinners are not left to regress into sin but are sanctified for a life of obedience that corresponds to and participates in the obedience of Jesus Christ.

Hunsinger argues that,

At the same time (*simul*), through our Lord's exaltation as the Son of man, and again at the level of our universal objective participation in it, that same great exchange occurred in another aspect. The God who had validated our Lord's entry into the death of godless sinners (as God had continuously validated him throughout the entire course of his faithful obedience on earth) was also the God who had exalted him and us with him, into the freedom of eternal life, which is communion with God. This elevation grounds and constitutes our sanctification.<sup>572</sup>

It is the simultaneity of the humiliation and exaltation of the person and work of Jesus Christ (and all sinful humans in him), which is, according to Hunsinger, Barth's innovative way of perceiving in Jesus Christ's "saving history of reconciliation as fulfilled on the cross and made manifest in his resurrection, our justification [that] has taken place in and with our sanctification, even as our sanctification has taken place in and with our justification."<sup>573</sup> Barth then turns to argue how the sanctification of the sinner is the salvific corollary to her justification by God when he states that the

reconciliation of man with God takes place also in the form that He introduces as a new man the one in relation to whom He has set Himself in the right and whom He has set in the right in relation to Himself. He has introduced him in the new

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<sup>571</sup> Hunsinger, "A Tale of Two Simultaneities," 329.

<sup>572</sup> Hunsinger, "A Tale of Two Simultaneities," 329.

<sup>573</sup> Hunsinger, "A Tale of Two Simultaneities," 329.

form of existence of a faithful covenant-partner who is well-pleasing to Him and blessed by Him. “I will be your God” is the justification of man. “Ye shall be my people” is his sanctification.<sup>574</sup>

Furthermore, even though justification and sanctification are simultaneous they have a theological order and limit because, for Barth, “Justification is not sanctification and does not merge into it. Sanctification is not justification and does not merge into it.”<sup>575</sup> In order to prevent someone from confusing justification with sanctification or supplanting one with the other it must be understood that, for Barth, justification is the presupposition of sanctification, and sanctification is the consequence of justification. According to Migliore,

for Barth justification and sanctification are related in a special material order, with justification being the basis and presupposition of sanctification, and sanctification the aim and consequence of justification. While the order is not to be construed as a temporal sequence, it is unmistakably teleological. If justification is the basis of sanctification, [then] sanctification is the goal of justification.<sup>576</sup>

Moreover, not only does sanctification relate to justification, and *vice versa*, but also to the divine election of the creature become sinner. Johnson states that, for Barth,

Sanctification is what is “intended” in election and what is “executed” in the course of salvation history. For justification, on the other hand, the order is the reverse. As a matter of divine intention, justification is second, since it is the means God devised whereby to effectuate reconciliation. Yet in the order of execution it occupies a primary status as the “presupposition” in the light of which the Christian life unfolds.<sup>577</sup>

Consequently, for Barth, the justification and sanctification of the sinner by God determines the totality of her converted existence as simultaneously justified and sanctified. Just as God turns to the sinner and justifies her by faith alone in the

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<sup>574</sup> CD IV/2, 499.

<sup>575</sup> CD IV/2, 503.

<sup>576</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 287.

<sup>577</sup> Johnson, *The Mystery of God*, 141.

faithfulness of Jesus Christ so too God simultaneously sanctifies the sinner as seen in, but not caused by, her faithful obedience to Jesus Christ. According to Barth,

As God turns to sinful man, the conversion of the latter to God cannot be lacking. And the conversion of man to God presupposes at every point and in every form that God turns to him in free grace. That the two are inseparable mean that the doctrine of justification has to be described already as the way from sin to the right of God and man, and therefore as the way from death to life, which *God* goes with him. And it means for the doctrine of sanctification that it has to show that it is really with *man* that God is on this way as He reconciles the world with Himself in Jesus Christ.<sup>578</sup>

The final point Barth makes regarding the distinction between justification and sanctification is to reiterate their ordered equality. Even though the justification of the sinner is *theologically* prior to and determinative of her sanctification they cannot be temporally separated, especially in any psychological sense. Clifford Blake Anderson comments that, “A central purpose of Barth’s reworking of the doctrine of sanctification – both early and late – was to avoid conflating the event of sanctification with the psychological experiences of the individual Christian.”<sup>579</sup> This is not to say Barth despises the discipline of psychology but that one cannot begin with their “spiritual/religious” experiences and from them construct a Christian doctrine of sanctification. Rather, for Barth,

The *simul* of the one redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ cannot be split up into a temporal sequence, and in this way psychologised. The justification and sanctification of man, manifest in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and effective in the Holy Spirit, are an event in this *simul*, and not therefore in such a way that his justification first takes place separately (as though it could be his justification by God if it did not also include his sanctification), and then his sanctification takes place separately (as though it could be his sanctification by God if at all its stages and in all its forms it were not based upon and borne by the event of his justification). No, they both take place simultaneously and together, just as the living Jesus Christ, in whom they both take place and are effective, is

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<sup>578</sup> CD IV/2, 505. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>579</sup> Clifford Blake Anderson, “The Problem of Psychologism in Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Sanctification,” *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 18/3 (2002): 339.



simultaneously and together true God and true man, the Humiliated and the Exalted.<sup>580</sup>

Therefore, Barth points solely to Jesus Christ in and by whom the sinner is justified and sanctified because any other starting (and ending) point will lead the individual Christian (and possibly the Church) to baptize her supposed spiritual/religious experiences and exalt them to the authority of the triune God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Anderson remarks that, for Barth,

Starting from the psychological not only distorts the objective reality of conversion, but also the subjective, perhaps by encouraging fantasies of Christian perfectionism. Only a properly ordered theological epistemology, which moves from the objective to the subjective, can stave off the misunderstandings of sanctification fostered by our natural proclivity toward psychologism.<sup>581</sup>

The *simul*, which is paradigmatic for Barth's argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion, also determines his mature theological construction of the relationship between justification and sanctification because, as Hunsinger argues, "Justification and sanctification were, for Barth, two ways of describing reconciliation as a whole. Although they took place in Christ simultaneously, we cannot [thus] apprehend them simultaneously, but only sequentially."<sup>582</sup> Moreover, even though this relationship is ordered with justification preceding and determining sanctification, these two "moments" of the reconciliation of the sinner with God are symmetrical and equal. For Barth, "In the *simul* of the one divine will and action justification is first as basis and second as presupposition, sanctification first as aim and second as consequence; and therefore both are superior and both subordinate."<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> CD IV/2, 507.

<sup>581</sup> Anderson, "The Problem of Psychologism," 345.

<sup>582</sup> Hunsinger, "A Tale of Two Simultaneities," 329.

<sup>583</sup> CD IV/2, 508.

Having set out the proper order and relationship between justification and sanctification Barth then discusses the relationship between Jesus Christ and those whom he sanctifies in §66.2 (“The Holy One and the Saints”). The first point Barth makes is to set the parameters for those who are Jesus’ saints and those who are not (yet). In the background to this delimitation over who are and are not (yet) saints, is Barth’s response to interpretations of his mature doctrine of election from which some may conclude that because all humans are elect in Jesus Christ, all humans are justified and sanctified not only *de jure* in Jesus Christ but also *de facto* in their respective individualities. Barth clarifies that,

The sanctification of man, his conversion to God, is, like his justification, a transformation, a new determination, which has taken place *de jure* for the world and therefore for all men. *De facto*, however, it is not known by all men, just as justification has not *de facto* been grasped and acknowledged and known and confessed by all men, but only by those who are awakened to faith. It is the people of these men which has also been which has also known sanctification. Only God Himself knows the extent of this people, and its members. The invitation to belong to it is extended to all. Certainly it is not co-extensive with the human race as such. Certainly it is a special people of special men who are marked off from all others because they are set aside by God from among all others.<sup>584</sup>

And yet, for Barth, the question over who is and is not (yet) a saint in the fully realized sense is always a secondary (but nonetheless important) question that is subordinate to the primary question of who sanctifies the saints. In Migliore’s estimation of Barth’s doctrine of sanctification, “Jesus Christ and he alone is the Holy One. He is the primary subject of sanctification. Strictly speaking, statements about sanctification refer primarily and directly to Jesus Christ and only secondarily and indirectly to the saints. The saints are holy not in themselves but only by virtue

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<sup>584</sup> CD IV/2, 511.

of their participation in the Holy One.”<sup>585</sup> Therefore, for Barth, the ontic reality of Jesus Christ, who is the sole subject of the sanctification of the saints, objectively precedes and determines the subjective noetic possibility of whether or not a sinner hears and believes she has been created, elected, justified, and sanctified by Jesus Christ. Anderson correctly states that, “we may say that we know the objective side of human sanctification only by looking to Jesus Christ; [and so] we must firmly keep in mind the priority of objective to subjective knowledge when examining the subjective forms of sanctification.”<sup>586</sup> The sanctification of the sinner is objectively and eternally secure *extra nos* in Jesus Christ who is the basis and presupposition of her subjective participation in and actualization of her sanctification *in nobis* in him. This is why McCormack argues that, for Barth,

In terms of our objective being in Christ, we do not have to begin to participate. Objectively considered, we are already in Him. What we do come to, through revelation, is an active awareness and acknowledgement of that which is already true of us and a willing and faithful obedience in conformity to it. The Christian life is thus realized by means of a living conformity to the exalted life which Jesus embodied and instantiated. A *living* conformity: that means, one that is realized through the willed action of free and responsible human subjects.<sup>587</sup>

Another key motif for Barth in §66.2, and throughout the entire section, is the Christian’s participation in the sanctification of Jesus Christ. According to Barth, “Our sanctification consists in our participation in His sanctification as grounded in the efficacy and revelation of the grace of Jesus Christ.”<sup>588</sup> Migliore concurs that, “Sanctification for Barth, as for Calvin, is essentially union with or participation in

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<sup>585</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 289.

<sup>586</sup> Anderson, “The Problem of Psychologism,” 343.

<sup>587</sup> Bruce McCormack, “Afterword,” *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 18/3 (2002): 386. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>588</sup> *CD* IV/2, 517.

Christ, and each section of §66 should be read as contributing to the exposition of this theme.”<sup>589</sup> Barth’s Christocentric construal of the sanctification of the sinner, however, is not a denigration of the quality of the sinner’s sanctification relative to Jesus Christ as strictly and properly the sanctified human; rather, Barth’s Christocentric doctrine of sanctification guards, upholds, and sets the necessary limit to the sanctification of the sinner. Migliore remarks that, “If for Barth sanctification is directly ascribed only to the royal human being and only indirectly ascribed to the saints, this amounts to no ontological deprivation of the saints, no weakening of the reality of what is genuinely theirs in Jesus Christ.”<sup>590</sup> Moreover, because Barth’s doctrine of sanctification is determined by his actualistic ontology, the sanctification of the sinner is not a substantive and quantifiable reality; rather, it is historical and repetitious. According to McCormack, Barth’s doctrine of sanctification

is not to be construed metaphysically – in terms of the indwelling of a substantially-conceived human nature. No human nature, Christ’s included, is rightly understood if conceived substantially. What believers participate in is the history of Jesus’ lived faith and obedience. That history is re-iterated in them insofar as their existence is brought into conformity to that of Jesus.<sup>591</sup>

Barth further clarifies and intensifies his actualistic ontology of the sanctification of the sinner when he excludes the equally pernicious extremes of a mechanistic and magical interpretation of sanctification. Barth states that “the power or sowing which proceeds from the existence of the royal man Jesus, the critical and constructive force with which He invades the being of men and makes them His saints, is not a mechanical or organic or any other physical operation, nor is it in any

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<sup>589</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 288.

<sup>590</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 289.

<sup>591</sup> Bruce McCormack, “Sanctification After Metaphysics: Karl Barth in Conversation with John Wesley’s Conception of ‘Christian Perfection,’” in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly Kopic (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 118.

sense a magical [operation].”<sup>592</sup> Migliore summarizes well Barth’s actualistic ontology as determinative of his doctrine of sanctification when he states that,

Barth’s doctrine of sanctification cannot be abstracted from the comprehensive theological ontology in which it is embedded. It presupposes a realistic understanding of the eternal election of God to be God for humanity; it presupposes a realistic trinitarian understanding of God as the God who lives in eternal self-giving love, who freely enters into fellowship with humanity in Jesus Christ, and who freely gathers, builds up, and commissions a new community of men and women in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; it presupposes a realistic understanding of the union of the eternal Word of God and human nature in Jesus Christ in which all humanity is included.<sup>593</sup>

Barth concludes §66.2 by describing the sanctified sinner as a “disturbed sinner.” Along with his appropriation and adaptation of the “justified sinner” Barth further interprets the individual Christian as someone who knows she is a proud and slothful sinner always in need of forgiveness. According to Barth, “The people of God in the world are those who still stand in daily need of forgiveness but upon whose hearts and consciences there has been written, not their own or a human, but the divine contradiction of their sinning.”<sup>594</sup> Even though the justified and sanctified sinner has been definitively severed from the first Adam by the last Adam, i.e., Jesus Christ, she still sins in a blatant but futile denial of her justification and sanctification. And yet, as a “disturbed sinner,” she cannot remain in and ceaselessly perpetuate her sins because, according to Migliore, disturbed sinners

recognize the real limit that has been set to their being as sinners. They know that the kingdom of God realized and manifest in Jesus Christ constitutes an active protest against their now complacent, now defiant existence in sin. They cannot deny that a real limit has been set to their titanic pride, miserable sloth, and chronic falsehood.<sup>595</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> *CD IV/2*, 523.

<sup>593</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 290.

<sup>594</sup> *CD IV/2*, 525.

<sup>595</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 290.

Inasmuch as the justified sinner participates in the sanctification of Jesus Christ by which she knows her slothfulness, the positive aspect of being sanctified *in* Jesus Christ is to be sanctified *for* Jesus Christ, which is why Barth contends that the saints

are saints as they lift up themselves in obedience to the call which comes to them. But they are not saints in virtue of the seriousness or consistency with which they make this movement, or look to the One who calls them. They are saints only in virtue of the sanctity of the One who calls them and on whom their gaze is not very well directed.<sup>596</sup>

In §66.3 (“The Call to Discipleship”) Barth argues how the sanctification of the justified sinner is concretely evidenced in the call of the Christian to a life of discipleship. Because, for Barth, the sinner has been materially justified by faith and thereby participates in the holiness of Jesus Christ she must be formed into his disciple. Barth declares that, “The lifting up of for which He gives [the saints] freedom is not a movement which is formless, or to which they themselves have to give the necessary form. It takes place in a definite form and direction [...] The call issued by Jesus is a call to discipleship.”<sup>597</sup> This “call,” however, is not a socio-religious suggestion or even a refutable invitation but a divine command that authoritatively claims and summons the sinner to be justified by faith and be sanctified as a disciple of Jesus Christ. According to Barth,

The grace which comes to [the sinner] requires that he should do something, i.e., follow Jesus. It is thus a grace which commands. Jesus is seeking men to serve Him. He has already found them to the extent that He has elected them as ordained to this end. They are already His people even as He claims them. He thus establishes His particular relationship to them by commanding them. He does this in His authority as the Son of Man who is their Lord, who can thus dispose concerning them, who has already done so, and who addresses them accordingly.<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> CD IV/2, 528.

<sup>597</sup> CD IV/2, 533.

<sup>598</sup> CD IV/2, 535.

This is why, when Jesus Christ calls a sinner to follow him, he is not calling her to assent to a worldview or an ideology because, for Barth, “discipleship is not the recognition and adoption of a programme, ideal or law, or the attempt to fulfill it. It is not the execution of a plan or individual or social construction imparted and commended by Jesus.”<sup>599</sup> Rather, Christian discipleship is faithful obedience wherein faith and obedience are identical, because, as Barth says, “in practice the command to follow Jesus is identical with the command to believe in Him.”<sup>600</sup> The reason Barth is adamant that the call to discipleship can only be found in the divine address to the sinner by Jesus Christ is because of the perennial temptation to reduce Christian discipleship to a cerebral idea or religious axiom. According to Gorringer, “Barth notes that the call to discipleship binds us not to an idea of Christ, a Christology, or a Christocentric system of thought, but to the living Lord. The command to follow Jesus is a summons to a first definite step, involving a right about turn, a complete break and a new beginning.”<sup>601</sup> And yet, faithful obedience to the call of Jesus Christ cannot materialize unless the sinner participates in his sanctified humanity. Migliore sees Barth’s actualistic ontology influence his doctrine of discipleship when he states that, for Barth,

Participation in Christ is neither an exercise in Platonic metaphysics, nor simply thinking correctly about Christ, nor repeating certain rituals in his honor, nor adopting certain spiritual disciplines and procedures that lead to a mystical union with him, nor obeying a set of moral regulations distilled from the biblical witness. Participation in Christ is essentially responding to the call of the living Lord and following after him.<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> CD IV/2, 536.

<sup>600</sup> CD IV/2, 536.

<sup>601</sup> Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 249.

<sup>602</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 291.

Just as Jesus Christ cannot be reduced to a mere notion so too the sanctified

community cannot be reduced to a heavenly ideal. Migliore contends that, for Barth,

The new humanity of Jesus is not to be reduced to a mere cipher of some social or political ideology or to a paradigm of moralistic piety. Barth refuses to describe the path of discipleship as a simplistic *imitatio Christi* or an easy transference of stories and sayings of Jesus from the New Testament to our situation today. The call of Jesus is always concrete and can never be reduced to a timeless generalization. Nevertheless, for Barth the call of Jesus is neither empty nor amorphous. It has a particular form or shape. It gives us concrete direction.<sup>603</sup>

Furthermore, Barth upholds the sole necessity of the divine possibility of calling a sinner to discipleship when he contends that there “is no discipleship without the One who calls to it. There is no discipleship except as faith in God as determined by the One who calls it and frees for it. There is no discipleship which does not consist in the act of obedience of this faith in God and therefore in Him.”<sup>604</sup> Hence,

McCormack is correct to conclude that, for Barth, sanctification “entails a command, an instruction, a direction that engages the human person as a free subject who is capable of a willing obedience and corresponding to the exalted humanity brought into being by Jesus’ life of perfect obedience.”<sup>605</sup> Thus, the sanctified sinner always exists in the mode of following and obeying, which evidences her sanctification.

Barth then argues how the discipleship of the justified and sanctified sinner must manifest in self-denial, which attests her obedience to Jesus Christ. According to Barth, “To follow Jesus means to go beyond oneself in a specific action and attitude, and therefore to turn one’s back upon oneself, to leave oneself behind.”<sup>606</sup>

This is not, however, a call to self-immolation or an extreme form of asceticism in

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<sup>603</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 292.

<sup>604</sup> CD IV/2, 537.

<sup>605</sup> McCormack, “Afterword,” 371.

<sup>606</sup> CD IV/2, 538.



which the disciple of Jesus Christ attempts to accomplish great feats of devotion for God nor does it entail a minimalist approach of obedience in which she merely fulfills the form of Jesus' call as feigned piety. According to Barth,

Obedience is simple when we do just what we are told—nothing more, nothing less, and nothing different. In simple obedience we *do* it, and therefore we do not finally not do it. But what we do is literally and exactly that which we are commanded to do. The only possible obedience to Jesus' call to discipleship is simple obedience in these two senses. This alone is rendered in self-denial. This alone is the brave act of faith in Jesus.<sup>607</sup>

Moreover, Jesus' call to discipleship does not afford the sinner the opportunity to deliberate or negotiate with him over the relevance and/or practicality of the command given; rather, she must accept and enact this command in order to call herself a disciple of Christ. Barth states that the "commanding grace of God, and therefore salvation as Jesus' call to discipleship, never come into the life of a man in such a way that he is given leave to consider why and how he may best follow the command given."<sup>608</sup> The disciple hears the call of Jesus Christ and obeys his command without flinching or entertaining a possible excuse not to obey, which is why Sonderegger states that, for Barth, "To be sanctified, then, is to have an action imparted to us: we are commanded to obey a directive, and we rise up from our sloth and misery to begin carrying it out."<sup>609</sup>

The final aspect of the call to discipleship is the freedom of the Christian from the "powers/gods" that still try to control her since she broke from them in her conversion to Jesus Christ. When the sinner becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ she becomes a witness to the fact that God has entered into created time in Jesus Christ

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<sup>607</sup> CD IV/2, 540. Author's emphasis.

<sup>608</sup> CD IV/2, 542.

<sup>609</sup> Katherine Sonderegger, "Sanctification as Impartation in the Doctrine of Karl Barth," *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 18/3 (2002): 312.

and that his kingdom has invaded, defeated, and unmasked all of humanity's pseudo-kingdoms. Barth declares that, "The kingdom of God is revealed in this call; the kingdom which is among the kingdoms of this world, but which confronts and contradicts and opposes them; the *coup d'état* of God proclaimed and accomplished already in the existence of the man Jesus."<sup>610</sup> However, the various "powers/gods" that attempt to control the disciple of Jesus Christ are not, for Barth, intrinsically evil but become so when the disciple invests them with inordinate worth and exalts them above the kingdom of God. By way of example and illustration Barth argues that,

When they are posited absolutely, possessions (which are significantly described as the "mammon of unrighteousness" in Lk. 16<sup>9</sup>) and worldly honour, the force which defends them, the family with its claims and *even the law of a religion (and worst of all a religion of revelation)* are all gods which are first set up by man, which are then worshipped in practice and which finally dominate him, interposing themselves between God and him, and himself and his fellows, and maintaining themselves in this mediatorial position.<sup>611</sup>

The fitting response of the disciple is not to deny such things their right and proper place but to view their mythical power as unmasked in the revelation of Jesus Christ. According to McCormack, "Self-denial consists not in fleeing these things [...] but in public testimony to the fact that Christ has already decisively broken their power. In taking this step, in calling into question the reverence widely given to such 'factors,' the Christian will inevitably make herself unwelcome, a pariah, one who disturbs the peace."<sup>612</sup> Barth concludes §66.3 by emphasizing the ethics of discipleship, which prevents it being idealized and abstracted from the concrete concerns of creation in which the disciple obeys the commands of Jesus Christ. Migliore summarizes this subsection well when he states that

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<sup>610</sup> CD IV/2, 543.

<sup>611</sup> CD IV/2, 544. Emphasis mine.

<sup>612</sup> McCormack, "Sanctification After Metaphysics," 120.

§66.3 serves to underscore the ethical aspect of participation in Christ, speaking of it in terms of the call of Jesus to the new freedom, new obedience, and new service of discipleship. In brief, Barth chooses not to define the Christian life as determined by sacramental rites, mystical practices, or moral codes. Instead, he defines participation in Christ in terms of being personally addressed by the living Lord and being called to free, responsible, and mature discipleship.<sup>613</sup>

In §66.4 (“The Awakening to Conversion”) Barth discusses the root cause of discipleship when he argues that the sinner’s conversion is an awakening from her sin of sloth that compels her to answer the call to discipleship. For Barth, however, this “awakening” cannot be reduced to a mere mental assent or psychological state but includes every aspect of the human as the totality of her being is addressed in the event of divine revelation. Anderson remarks that Barth “asserted that conversion is a movement of the total human being, which cannot be restricted to any particular dimension of human existence.”<sup>614</sup> Furthermore, because the totality of the human is confronted in the event of divine revelation, she is totally converted; and yet, for Barth, she cannot simply and naïvely read off her, or another disciple’s, conversion experience and construct a Christian doctrine of conversion, particularly as it relates to her sanctification. Barth argues that,

the jolt by which man is wakened and at which he awakens, his awakening itself as the act in which this takes place and he rises, is not the work of one of the creaturely factors, co-efficients and agencies which are there at work and can be seen, but of the will and act of God who uses these factors and Himself makes them co-efficients and agencies for this purpose, setting them in motion as such in the meaning and direction which He has appointed.<sup>615</sup>

Barth does not deny the genuineness and seriousness of the sinner’s conversion but believes it cannot be the methodological starting-point and chief criterion for a Christian doctrine of conversion. For Migliore, although the conversion of the sinner

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<sup>613</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 292.

<sup>614</sup> Anderson, “The Problem of Psychologism,” 343-344.

<sup>615</sup> *CD* IV/2, 557.

“takes place as a real happening to real people in space and time, conversion is not something that can be read off the facts accessible to personal introspection or empirical description. Rather, the reality of conversion is based on the activity of the living triune God.”<sup>616</sup> McCormack clarifies when he states that, for Barth

There is no recognition and acknowledgement of the conversion of the human in Christ without a corresponding conversion on the side of the human knower. That subjective experience is not to be made the starting-point for theological reflection on the Christian life does not mean that there is no subjective experience.<sup>617</sup>

Thus, the sanctified sinner’s subjective experience and knowledge of her sanctification always follows her prior ontic, objective participation in Jesus Christ.

Once Barth establishes his methodological ordering for his doctrine of conversion he proceeds to argue for its twofold reality as a once-for-all *and* continual event in the life of the Christian. It is to the concrete history of God in Jesus Christ with the sinner that Barth looks when he contends for the initial and continual experience of conversion for the sinner. For Barth, the conversion of the sinner is the evidence that God is the God he is when he argues that

God would not be God if this awakening did not take place. For He would not be the God of the covenant; of His free grace. He would not be the God who is true to this covenant as the Reconciler of the world which has fallen from Him, and therefore as the One who awakens man from the sleep of death and calls him to Himself. He would not, then, be God at all. As truly as He is God, so truly He does this. The basis of Christian existence lies as deep as this. It is not the Christian who guarantees it. It is God Himself. God Himself takes responsibility for its reality.<sup>618</sup>

Because the God of Jesus Christ is eternally free to be faithful he not only calls and converts the sinner but also upholds her by continually calling and converting her.

According to Migliore, “Barth thus describes the awakening to conversion as a

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<sup>616</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 293.

<sup>617</sup> McCormack, “Afterword,” 376.

<sup>618</sup> *CD* IV/2, 558.

history or movement that encompasses the whole of our lives. It has to do with our relationship with God and neighbors, our public as well as private lives, our ordinary as well as extraordinary moments of experience. To be a Christian is to be in this movement and transition.”<sup>619</sup> Because the sinner participates in the history of the covenantal relation with God in Jesus Christ it does not mean her actualization of the Christian life is a steady, upward progression toward greater holiness. Rather, as Migliore understands Barth, “The movement of conversion, far from being smooth or unbroken, is a history of dispute and conflict between our old humanity and our new humanity in Christ. But while conflictual, [the] Christian life has a goal. The conflict is not an eternal stalemate between the old and the new.”<sup>620</sup> Barth sees the Christian life as a continual battle because his doctrine of sanctification is determined by his doctrine of justification, especially since the sinner needs to be continually forgiven her sins and continually re-made a saint. Gorringer comments that,

Like justification, discipleship is a call to conversion which is not a matter of one moment in our life, but forms the content and character of the whole. The *vita christiana* in conversion is the event, act, and history in which at one and the same time human beings are still wholly the old man and already wholly the new, not in a static equipoise but in the whole turning from one to the other.<sup>621</sup>

For Barth the sinner has been converted to be converted, which means she cannot undo her conversion nor rest complacently on her past conversion experience(s) and thereby refuse to heed the daily call of Jesus Christ to discipleship. As the justified sinner needs daily forgiveness of her sins so too she needs to be converted daily and continually sanctified. Barth contrasts the sanctified sinner who has been and is being converted with one not (yet) when he states that

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<sup>619</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 293.

<sup>620</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 293.

<sup>621</sup> Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 249.

The difference between the life of the one who is engaged in conversion and that of others is not that the former moves itself, but that it has an axis on which to turn. It is properly this axis which makes this man a new man, giving him a part in its own movement. But the axis which makes his life a movement in conversion is the reality which is not concealed from him, but revealed as the truth, that God is for him and therefore that he is for God.<sup>622</sup>

It is Barth's later argument for the once-for-all and continual event of the conversion of the sinner that has strong continuity with his earlier argument in §17.3 for the continual creation and election of the Christian religion. Moreover, with the Christian religion needing continual forgiveness of its sin of faithlessness, which is its justification, the actuality and historicity of the sublimation of the Christian religion is a continual reality that is realized in God's sovereign outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the event of divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

The final aspect of Barth's doctrine of conversion in §66.4 is his reliance upon and employment of the *simul iustus et peccator*, particularly that a justified sinner is also simultaneously a sanctified sinner. Barth contends that,

The man who to-day is confronted by that call to halt and advance, who to-day is set in that movement, in the totality of his existence and being, by the powerful truth that God is for him and he for God, is also to-day, and again in the totality of his existence and being, the sinful human of yesterday. Thus in the to-day of repentance we have not only to do with the presence of certain regrettable traces of his being and action of yesterday. No, the one who is under the determination and in the process of becoming a totally new man is in his totality the old man of yesterday.<sup>623</sup>

As was argued earlier, Barth's argument for the Christian religion as the true religion is wholly premised upon the *simul*, which is why it is not surprising that it is used in his mature doctrine of sanctification. In fact, it is completely commensurate when Barth states that "Luther's *simul (totus) iustus, simul (totus) peccator* has thus to be applied strictly to sanctification and therefore conversion if we are to see deeply into what is

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<sup>622</sup> CD IV/2, 560-561.

<sup>623</sup> CD IV/2, 571.

denoted by these terms, and to understand them with the necessary seriousness.”<sup>624</sup>

Even though Barth is a Reformed theologian he sides with Luther before Calvin when he sees the sanctification of the sinner as a repetitious (before it is a progressive) reality because the justified sinner is sanctified both at her initial conversion and everyday thereafter meaning she must daily begin again the Christian life. This does not mean Barth sees and expects no progress in the life of a Christian; however, the religious gains made today by the Christian cannot be built and relied upon tomorrow. Barth states that,

The *vita christiana* in conversion is the event, the act, the history, in which at one and the same time man is still wholly the old man and already wholly the new—so powerful is the sin by which he is determined from behind, and so powerful the grace by which he is determined from before. It is this way that man knows himself when he is really engaged in conversion.<sup>625</sup>

Barth’s doctrine of sanctification is not so much a “more-and-more” but an “again-and-again” as he is concerned not with a quantitative but with a qualitative assessment of the Christian as determined by Jesus Christ. According to McCormack, “If there is a ‘more and more’ to sanctification, it consists in the fact that living in humble self-denial – which was the constant feature of the life of Christ – is an increasingly frequent occurrence. It is becoming the pattern of my life and not merely episodic.”<sup>626</sup> The justified and sanctified sinner cannot point to any meritorious accumulation of holiness that can be carried forward and with which she can then self-righteously compare herself to others within and outside the Christian religion; rather, she must confess that, although she is totally sanctified in and to become more like Jesus Christ, she is still totally sinful as evidenced particularly in

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<sup>624</sup> CD IV/2, 572.

<sup>625</sup> CD IV/2, 572.

<sup>626</sup> McCormack, “Sanctification After Metaphysics,” 119-120.

her faithless religiosity. Having begun with the sinner's sanctification as *simul iustus et peccator* from Luther, Barth then complements it with Calvin's understanding of *participatio Christi* when he argues that,

It is in [Jesus'] conversion that we are engaged. It is in His birth from above, the mystery and miracle of Christmas, that we are born again. It is in His baptism in the Jordan that we are baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire. It is in His death on the cross that we are dead as old men, and in His resurrection in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea that we are risen as new men.<sup>627</sup>

Barth's doctrine of conversion in particular and his doctrine of sanctification in general are a uniting of the *simul* of Luther with the *participatio* of Calvin but are not focused directly, initially, or ultimately on the sinful human but first, foremost, and always on Jesus Christ. Hunsinger summarizes Barth's doctrine of conversion relative to sanctification when he states,

Sanctification is thus a christocentric and eschatological event. It does not come by degrees, but it does come continually and provisionally here and now as what it will one day be openly and definitively – the liberation of the sinner from bondage to both sin and death. Sanctification exalts the sinner from bondage to freedom, and from death to life, as these have already occurred by way of objective *koinonia* in Christ. For as the exalted Son of man, Christ himself *is* our sanctification, and the sanctification that has taken place in him is ours continually by grace through faith.<sup>628</sup>

It is in the penultimate section of §66.5 (“The Praise of Works”) where one sees the strongest theological continuity between the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification (§17.3) and the sanctification of the sinner.

However, before demonstrating the theological continuities between these particular subsections it must first be clarified what Barth means by the title – “The Praise of Works.” Barth immediately rules out the alternative title of “Good Works” as this would suggest a meritoriousness to the Christian's works, instead preferring “The

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<sup>627</sup> CD IV/2, 583.

<sup>628</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 335. Author's emphasis.



Praise of Works” because, according to Barth, “it at once tells us something definite and even decisive concerning what constitutes the goodness of works: that God can and will and actually does praise them; and that they for their part can and may and actually do praise Him.”<sup>629</sup> This dialectical duality to the Christian’s works praising and being praised by God is necessary for Barth as he believes it simultaneously upholds the fittingness of the object of praise to whom the Christian’s good works testify, i.e., the God of Jesus Christ, and it also acknowledges the reality of the honourable status of the Christian’s good works thereby not evacuating them of their real goodness. According to Migliore, “There can be no question of merit or boasting in our works. Yet the works of the saints are good in so far as they declare and thus participate in the good work of God.”<sup>630</sup> Therefore, the works of the Christian are “praiseworthy” meaning the sanctified sinner can rightfully claim her subjective sanctification relative to all other humans. Barth declares that,

They cannot be Christians, and belong to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Head to no purpose. If they are sanctified in Him, and called to His discipleship, and awakened to conversion, and engaged in conversion under His powerful rule, and if they are all these things in their lives and therefore in the sequence of their works, inevitably there will be in their works some element of the praise of God (in this twofold sense), and therefore of goodness.<sup>631</sup>

What must always be remembered, however, is that God praises the works of the sanctified sinner and not the sanctified sinner herself as the latter would be a prideful and misplaced boasting of which there can be none before God. Thus, the divine praise of the Christian’s works is warranted only by virtue of the Christian’s participation in Jesus Christ. McCormack rightly concludes that, for Barth,

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<sup>629</sup> *CD IV/2*, 585.

<sup>630</sup> Migliore, “*Participatio Christi*,” 294.

<sup>631</sup> *CD IV/2*, 585.

The works of the sanctified are not good because those who do them are intrinsically good or because the works themselves are intrinsically good. It is because God accepts a work, that He *takes it up* as done in service to Himself and gives it a share in His own missionary activity in this world that it is “good.” Thus the praise of works looks in two directions: the works which contribute to our sanctification praise God and God praises them, thereby making them “good.”<sup>632</sup>

Barth then proceeds to expound the relationship between the sanctification of the sanctified sinner relative to her creation and election by drawing lines of continuity between these respective doctrines. Barth believes that whenever a sanctified sinner performs good works she must acknowledge in faith that it is God who works these good works in and through her. This is not to say the sanctified sinner is either a marionette puppet or an autonomous moral agent who arbitrarily desires to cooperate with God to perform a good work; rather, it is God’s covenant of election with creation in Jesus Christ that determines his relation to his creation and *vice versa*. Barth argues that

It is [God’s] work in the history of this covenant, in which the history of the whole cosmos participates, and which constitutes the meaning and true content of the history of the whole cosmos. As creation, according to Gen. I, is the outward basis of this covenant, and this covenant the inward basis of creation, there begins at once in and with creation the history of this covenant, and therefore the proper work of God to which all His other works are subordinate.<sup>633</sup>

This macro perspective, wherein God performs good works in and through sanctified sinners, is not Barth’s sole perspective as he immediately follows with his micro perspective by drawing upon his doctrine of election. Ultimately, what distinguishes the sanctified sinner from the remainder of creation is her performing good works in correspondence to her election in Jesus Christ. Migliore remarks that, for Barth, “God is the primary subject of the history of the covenant between God and

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<sup>632</sup> McCormack, “Sanctification After Metaphysics,” 121. Emphasis mine.

<sup>633</sup> CD IV/2, 588.

humanity, but in Jesus Christ men and women of faith become secondary subjects whose works may both serve and correspond to the works of God.”<sup>634</sup> For Barth it is the covenant constituted by the election of Jesus Christ, as the internal basis of creation, that is testified to in the Old and New Testaments, and which provides the most definitive witness for why God must be praised since it is he works in and through the good works performed by his elect community comprised of justified and sanctified sinners. Barth rehearses the historical actualization of God’s eternal covenant in Jesus Christ when he states that,

This history, and therefore the proper work of God, emerges with the election, calling, preservation and overruling of the people Israel, in which, according to the witness of the Old Testament, there is heralded the actualisation of the glory of God and the salvation of man. It attains its goal in the fact that God Himself becomes man and as such performs that which is promised, actualising His own glory and man’s salvation. That this has taken place in Jesus Christ, that all human history and that of the whole cosmos can only hasten to the direct and universal and definitive revelation of this completed work of God, is what the community which has derived from Israel in its Lord and Head now has to proclaim, according to the witness of the New Testament, in the last time which is still left to itself and the world.<sup>635</sup>

As secondary subjects in the good works of God, who is their primary subject, sanctified sinners evidence their sanctification when they proclaim that the good works they perform are good because God declares them so. Migliore states that, “Barth’s point is that God does in fact elect, call, and empower saints to be witnesses and thus to participate in the good work of God in events small and large. The gift of grace is not a mechanical or magical force but a humanizing power that engages us in our own particular time and place and takes us into its active service.”<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 295.

<sup>635</sup> *CD IV/2*, 588. Again Barth begins with creation and then moves to election even though his doctrine of election determines his doctrine of creation.

<sup>636</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 295.

The divine praise of the good works accomplished by the sanctified sinner in the event of her proclamation of and participation in the good work of God in Jesus Christ does not mean, however, that the sanctified sinner progresses beyond her existence as *simul iustus et peccator*. And yet, this must not lead her to despair as, according to Barth, “even a sinful man in his sinful work—and we are all sinners and all our works are sinful—may declare the good work of God, and therefore, even as a sinner and in the course of sinning, do a good work.”<sup>637</sup> Hunsinger also summarizes Barth’s use of the *simul* relative to sanctification of the sinner when he states,

Because by definition sin and sanctity are mutually exclusive, and because even after baptism we still remain sinners in ourselves, we are sanctified not by the gradual growth of Christ into us, or of us into Christ... but by the perpetual operation of grace in the life of faith, which breaks the dominion of sin. This perpetual operation is rooted in our active participation in Christ, who, in the strict and proper sense, is and remains our sanctification in himself. Just as sin’s guilt was removed by the humiliation of the Son of God for our justification by the gift of our participation in his righteousness, so sin’s bondage was removed by the exaltation of the Son of [M]an by the gift of our participation in his new and unending life in communion with God.<sup>638</sup>

Furthermore, the good works of the sanctified sinner always point away from the one who performs them, as they are the sanctified proclamation to the God who works in all the good works of the sanctified sinner. Barth states that, “Works can be good only as they declare what God has done and accomplished—the goodness in which He has turned to man and given Himself for him. That works are capable of this declaration [however] does not alter the fact that they are the sinful works of great or little sinners.”<sup>639</sup> With these qualifications in mind one sees how Barth’s more positive argument for the praise of the works of a sanctified sinner is determined by

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<sup>637</sup> CD IV/2, 589.

<sup>638</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 337.

<sup>639</sup> CD IV/2, 590.

her participation in Jesus Christ; and just as the sanctification of the sinner is a participatory event it is also always a unilateral movement from God to the sinner and only then a corresponding response from the sanctified sinner. Barth believes the goodness of the works of the sanctified sinner “comes down from above into the human depths. It is imparted to them from above. And in the human depths it can only magnify the majesty of God to which it originally and properly belongs.”<sup>640</sup> It is this asymmetrical and continual movement of the God of Jesus Christ in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that sanctifies the sinner so she may proclaim to the world that God has created, elected, and justified her. For Barth, this unilateral movement of God precludes all self-righteous boasting on the part of the sanctified sinner; instead it frees and empowers her to proclaim all the more fervently and frequently that God was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Sonderegger concludes well that, for Barth,

As the Divine Son imparts Personality enhypostatically to the human essence... so Christ imparts in His Spirit reality and sanctity to the people of whom He is the Head. They are not in fact proper human persons without this assumption of them into his directing headship. They are a people, and then, a person, by rising up in the Spirit to be his body in earth and history. But they are not coerced by this impartation; rather they are freed by it. Nor are they merged into his Reality, any more than the flesh assumed by the Son is divinized by its correspondence to and intimacy with divinity. But for all the distinction, neither the flesh the Son assumes nor the sanctified that Christ hallows exist fully, properly or freely apart from Him.<sup>641</sup>

Because God participates in human history in Jesus Christ all humans (especially Christians) can participate in the sanctification that makes them true humans.

Migliore states that the “*participatio Christi* is thus marked by a differentiated co-agency of Jesus Christ and the saints in which Jesus Christ is the living Lord and the

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<sup>640</sup> CD IV/2, 590.

<sup>641</sup> Sonderegger, “Sanctification as Impartation,” 313.

saints act as his servants whose works neither augment nor complete, let alone replace his saving work, but simply attest and correspond to it.”<sup>642</sup>

Barth concludes §66.5 by reiterating his central argument for the praise of the works of the Christian as those that praise the God who works in her good works as their primary and ultimate subject. The key motif that has the strongest continuity between §17.3 and §66.5 is proclamation in which the sanctified sinner engages, is praised for, and is communally sublimated. However, the possibility for proclamation exists only because the sanctified sinner participates in the eternal covenant of God’s self-election in Jesus Christ, which is determinative of humanity in general and the Christian religion in particular. According to Barth,

The history of the covenant, whose acting Subject is God, now takes place in its relationship to them in such a way that their personal history, whose subjects they themselves are, can no longer be alien or neutral in its relationship to it, but necessarily takes place in actual correspondence with it. To the extent that this is the case, they and their works are declarations of the work of God, having a part both in the annunciation of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament and His proclamation in the New, and thus being good works.<sup>643</sup>

And yet, the sanctified sinner is not yet wholly free from the presence and persistence of sin, which is why Barth immediately qualifies his positive statement with its unfortunate, but necessary, negative boundary when he states that,

It is to be noted that the men in relationship to whom the good work of God has this particular form are sinners like the rest—possibly to a lesser degree, possibly to a greater, but still sinners. They are not differentiated from others by the fact that they are not transgressors in the judgment of God, or that even their good works are not full of transgression.<sup>644</sup>

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<sup>642</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 295.

<sup>643</sup> *CD IV/2*, 592.

<sup>644</sup> *CD IV/2*, 592.

In the light of this twofold limitation Barth contends that, “None of the true saints of God can ever imagine that in his works he is really doing something outstanding in the sense of putting God under an obligation or earning His grace and favour.”<sup>645</sup>

§66.6 (“The Dignity of the Cross”) is the final subsection and in it Barth argues that the cross Jesus Christ bore is, in an analogous and very real way, the cross of his disciples. The theological connection between the “The Praise of Works” and “The Dignity of the Cross” is the determination by and formation of the life of the Christian by the cross of Jesus Christ. Spross summarizes this connection when he states that

The sanctified have been called for a purpose and this purpose is to give praise to God with their good works, which have no saving merit in and of themselves. God gives the sanctified work to do, and these works are done because they are a reconciled people. There is a diametric difference between doing good works *because* one has been reconciled and doing good works in order to *become* reconciled; the good works of the sanctified are only the former. And as the sanctified render obedient service to the God who has reconciled them, they come into intimate contact with the cross of Christ and realize that in order to save their own lives they must surrender to His life and lose their own.<sup>646</sup>

For Barth it is not the incarnation or resurrection of Jesus Christ alone that determines the life of the Christian but his crucifixion, even though his crucifixion presupposes his incarnation and is only effectual because of his resurrection. Barth states that, “The cross is the most concrete form of the fellowship between Christ and the Christian. As the bearing of the cross was and is for Jesus Christ His coronation as the one Son of Man, the royal man, so for the Christian the cross which he has to suffer is his investiture with the distinction, glory and dignity proper to him as a Christian.”<sup>647</sup> Therefore, whatever praiseworthy works the Christian performs they

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<sup>645</sup> CD IV/2, 594.

<sup>646</sup> Spross, “The Doctrine of Sanctification,” 68. Author’s emphasis.

must conform to the pattern of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in order to be praiseworthy; and yet, for Barth, these works are not a slavish mimicry whereby the Christian attempts to extend or supplement the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Migliore remarks that, for Barth,

Human action in correspondence with the activity of God will be cruciform. Here as before, participation in Christ is to be construed in a way that underscores the freedom and responsibility of the Christian. Specifically, participation in the cross of Christ is not a mystical or sacramental repetition of the death of Christ or a completion of his sufferings.<sup>648</sup>

In fact, it is important to note that just as the cross of Jesus Christ determines the pattern of the Christian life it does not mean, for Barth, the literal cross Jesus Christ bore is identical to the metaphorical cross Christians bear. Barth states that, “We must be clear at the very outset that the connexion between the cross of Jesus Christ and that of the Christian, for all its direct necessity, is not a direct but only an indirect connexion.”<sup>649</sup> Barth also remarks that the cross-bearing of Christians,

do not accompany Him in an equality of their cross with His. And they certainly do not precede Him in the sense that His cross acquires reality and significance only as they take up their [*auf sich nehmen*] cross. Behind this view there stands the ancient mystical notion that it is Christ’s own cross that Christians have to take up [*aufzunehmen*] and carry. This notion is quite false.<sup>650</sup>

In the light of these negative qualifications Barth delineates the positive aspects and proper ordering of the Christian’s life by the cross of Jesus Christ. Barth believes

The cross of Jesus is His own cross, carried and suffered *for* many, but *by* Him alone and not by many, let alone by all and sundry. He suffers His rejection not merely as a rejection by men but, fulfilled by men, as a rejection by God—the

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<sup>647</sup> CD IV/2, 599.

<sup>648</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 295.

<sup>649</sup> CD IV/2, 599.

<sup>650</sup> CD IV/2, 599-600; *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/2 (Zürich: EVZ, 1955), 678. Hereafter *KD* IV/2.



rejection which all others deserved and ought to have suffered, but which He bore in order that it should no more fall on them.<sup>651</sup>

This means the Christian must not attempt to try to bear literally the cross of Jesus Christ but must allow his cross to mould and shape her life into a cruciform testimony and witness to the One who bore his cross for all. Migliore argues that, “In his passion and death on the cross Christ suffers not merely humankind’s rejection but the rejection of God. This cross Christians neither can nor should try to bear. Christians bear their cross in correspondence with the cross that Christ bears but in no sense in identity with what he has done for them.”<sup>652</sup> Furthermore, even though the cross many Christians bear and have borne throughout the history of the church is not necessarily and always literal, their cross-bearing can manifest in a plurality of ways. According to Barth,

The cross involves hardship, anguish, grief, pain and finally death. But those who are set in this movement willingly undertake to bear this because it is essential to this movement that it should finally, i.e., in its basis and goal, be crossed through [*durchkreuztes*] in this way. We are necessarily outside the movement if we will not take up [*auf sich zu nehmen*] and bear our cross; if we try to escape the *tolerantia crucis* (Calvin).<sup>653</sup>

Moreover, Barth does not believe Christians should seek out hardship as a means to justify their religious convictions but neither should they be surprised when hardship befalls them because of whose cross they bear. Migliore remarks that, for Barth,

Christians are not to seek to suffer on the assumption that their suffering is salvific. They are called to suffer with Christ in their ministry of witness to Christ, in the misfortunes and pains that come to them as to all human beings, and not least in their wrestling with their doubts. But they are not to think of these sufferings as accomplishing what only Christ can and has accomplished. Christians will not desire or try to bring about their suffering.<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> CD IV/2, 600. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>652</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 296.

<sup>653</sup> CD IV/2, 602; KD IV/2, 680.

Therefore, Christians are truly human because they alone are being conformed to the image of the crucified Jesus Christ in the power of his resurrection. This distinguishes Christians from all other humans because they bear the cross of Christ, which is the concrete manifestation of their sanctification. According to Barth, “Christians are distinguished and honoured by the fact that the fellowship with Jesus into which He Himself has received them finds final expression in the fact that their human and Christian life is marked like a tree for felling. The sign of the cross is the sign of the provisional character of their Christian existence.”<sup>655</sup> Thankfully just as Jesus Christ bore his cross for only a limited time so too the Christian bears her cross for a limited time because, as Jesus Christ was raised and vindicated as the true and faithful witness to God, so also will the Christian eventually be fully and finally sanctified at the final *Parousia* of Jesus Christ. The current hardships and sufferings of the Christian are a penultimate proclamation to the final word that will be spoken at the return of Jesus Christ. Again, the motif of proclamation is vital for Barth and he stresses its importance for the Christian to bear her cross because only as she proclaims Jesus Christ is she then sanctified. Barth contends that the Christian’s

cross points to the fulness and truth of that which he expects, and to which he hastens, as one who is sanctified in Jesus Christ. It points to God Himself, to His will for the world, to the future revelation of His majesty, to the glory in which his Lord already lives and reigns. As he comes to bear his cross, he finds himself prevented from forgetting this truth and fulness, and [is] encouraged to take comfort in it and stretch out towards it. His cross inter-crosses [*durchkreuzt*] his Christian life. He will not desire, or will, or try to bring it about, that this should happen. It will come unmasked and unsought. As he belongs to Jesus, it is inevitable that it should come. His sanctification is fulfilled in its coming.<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 296.

<sup>655</sup> *CD* IV/2, 605.

<sup>656</sup> *CD* IV/2, 606; *KD* IV/2, 686.

It will now be argued how Barth's mature doctrine of the sanctification of the human (which includes the sanctification of the Christian religion) relates to his ecclesiology in §67.1 ("The True Church"). Here Barth shows how his doctrine of the sanctification of the human is understood on a communal level. He argues that, "The Christian community, the true Church, arises and is only as the Holy Spirit works—the quickening power of the living Lord Jesus Christ. And it continues and is only as He sanctifies men and their human work, building up them and their work into the true Church."<sup>657</sup> The sanctification of the true church, however, does not proceed unhindered or without minor and even serious setbacks as its sanctification occurs between the resurrection and return of Jesus Christ, meaning it is both complete and yet still to be completed. For Barth, the true church is sanctified

in the time between the resurrection and the return of Jesus Christ and therefore in the time of the community [...] in the world, i.e., in this context the human world which participates only in the particular and provisional revelation of Jesus Christ and to that extent is still a prisoner to the flesh and sin and death. Christianity, too belongs to this world, and works and thinks and speaks and acts in it—even though its action is occasioned and fashioned by that of the Holy Spirit.<sup>658</sup>

Just as in his doctrines of justification and sanctification (not to mention the true religion), the *simul iustus et peccator* is the determinative doctrine for Barth's ecclesiology since the true church is comprised of justified and sanctified sinners.

Migliore comments that,

Barth's doctrine of the church is an ecclesiological adaptation of the principle of *simul iustus et peccator*. Because the Church is a fallible, sinful witness and the Spirit moves when and where and how he pleases, no particular practice of the church can become a means of grace and a concrete embodiment of the presence of the Spirit.<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> CD IV/2, 617.

<sup>658</sup> CD IV/2, 617.

<sup>659</sup> Migliore, "Participatio Christi," 302-303.

This is why, for Barth, the true church cannot claim to be so apart from the power and presence of Jesus Christ which is the Holy Spirit, because only when Jesus Christ pours out his Holy Spirit in the event of his self-revelation is the church sanctified. According to Barth, it is

always the omnipotent act of a special divine mercy, if the Church is not merely the semblance of a Church, but in spite of the sinfulness of the human action of Christians a true Church, and expressed and revealed as such. In its own strength this is quite impossible. Its institutions and traditions and even its reformations are no guarantee as such that it is the true Church, for in all these things we have to do with human and therefore sinful action, and therefore in some sense with a self-expression in which it can be only the semblance of a Church.<sup>660</sup>

Greggs' warning for the true church/religion is appropriate, when he states that,

The nature of the church as an event dependent upon the action of the Holy Spirit cannot itself be essentialized into some version of ecclesial purism: the church's very nature as dynamic and actualistic requires a constant alertness to the need to turn the critique of religion back onto itself and its own religiosity even in its quest to be a community formed by the dynamic and actualistic presence of the Spirit.<sup>661</sup>

The final aspect of Barth's argument for "The True Church" that pertains to our discussion of the sanctification of the human (and subsequently the sublimation of the Christian religion) is its eschatological expansiveness and capaciousness.

According to Barth,

The goal in the direction of which the true Church proceeds and moves is the revelation of the sanctification of all humanity and human life as it has already taken place *de iure* in Jesus Christ. In the exaltation of the one Jesus, who as the Son of God became a servant in order as such to become the Lord of all men, there has been accomplished already in powerful archetype, not only the cancellation of the sins and therefore the justification, but also the elevation and establishment of all humanity and human life and therefore its sanctification.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> CD IV/2, 618.

<sup>661</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 135.

<sup>662</sup> CD IV/2, 620.

The church, however, exists in this time-between-the-times as *simul iustus/sanctus et peccator* and, according to Greggs, the church still seeks “to displace God’s role as judge, [because] the church can so often seek to offer eschatological judgments over the appropriate level and kind of religiosity of groups of people and of individuals, seeking to identify the difference between good and evil, for self-preservation and anticipated divine preference.”<sup>663</sup> The church, however, must proclaim the God who sanctifies it because only in the event of its proclamation of the gospel does God, in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit, sanctify it. Barth states that, the church “is the holy community of the intervening period; the congregation or people which knows this elevation and establishment, this sanctification, not merely *de iure* but already *de facto*, and which is therefore a witness to all others, representing the sanctification which has already come upon them too in Jesus Christ.”<sup>664</sup> Moreover, the church’s proclamation that God was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to himself is not only in words but also in its actions. Migliore summarizes that,

The freedom of [the] Christian life for Barth is not a matter of arbitrary responses to episodic commands of God. Rather, Christians are called and empowered to live in the freedom of correspondence to God’s own form of life decisively revealed in Jesus Christ. They are called from a self-enclosed to an ecstatic form of existence in relation to God and neighbor, a life of self-giving love and inclusive community.<sup>665</sup>

Barth’s doctrine of sanctification is constructed in dependence upon his doctrine of justification because the sinner cannot be sanctified unless she is first and continually justified. As Hunsinger states, “our justification and sanctification are simultaneously present in Christ to faith as the two forms of Christ’s one reconciling

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<sup>663</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 123.

<sup>664</sup> *CD IV/2*, 620.

<sup>665</sup> Migliore, “Participatio Christi,” 301.

work.”<sup>666</sup> However, Barth does not collapse justification and sanctification into one another but distinguishes them, and Gunton correctly delineates the distinction when he states that, “Like justification, sanctification is treated ontologically by Barth and represents a move from the transcendent declaration of pardon to a more immanent conception of participation. Sanctification is participation in Jesus’ holiness.”<sup>667</sup>

This is why, according to Spross,

Barth’s doctrine of sanctification is a natural correlative of his doctrine of justification, with its definite and positive implications carried forward to the next step. It is a positive and triumphant doctrine in Barth, with radical implications. The death knell has already sounded for the power of evil and sin. Their dominion and rule of terror and agony has been overcome.<sup>668</sup>

In the light of this more unique nuances and emphases in Barth’s understanding of the sanctification of the sinner emerge, particularly participation. Hunsinger states:

Sanctification takes place, for Barth, at two levels – in Christ and in us. In Christ, as we have seen, our sanctification has taken place perfectly, once for all. At the existential level (*nobis*), as we have also seen, our relation to this perfect sanctification is one of acknowledgement, reception, participation, anticipation and proclamation.<sup>669</sup>

Where the current, though not final, disjunction between the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ and the imperfect holiness of his disciples emerges is in Jesus Christ’s total sanctified as the Holy One relative to his disciples who are still *simul sanctus et peccator*. Hunsinger again states that, for Barth, “The sanctification that is ours in Christ (by objective *koinonia*), Barth maintains, comes as such to those who receive Christ by faith (by active *koinonia*), even though those who receive Christ by faith

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<sup>666</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 334.

<sup>667</sup> Gunton, “Salvation,” 150.

<sup>668</sup> Spross, “The Doctrine of Sanctification,” 71.

<sup>669</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 334.

remain sinners in themselves, not partially but categorically (*totus*).”<sup>670</sup> Thankfully, the current reality of the sanctified sinner is not her final one as Jesus Christ continually sanctifies her in anticipation that at his return he will sanctify all of his disciples fully and finally. For Spross, “Ultimately, Barth’s doctrine of sanctification takes seriously the sinfulness of sin and its impact upon man; but it takes equally (and technically even more seriously since it demands prior consideration) seriously the implications of the justifying and sanctifying work of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>671</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter it has been argued how Barth’s doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification in §17.3 has a significant continuity with his mature doctrine of sanctification, particularly in §66.5 with his emphasis on proclamation as a praiseworthy work. Although the theme of participation is much more robust in Barth’s later doctrine of sanctification than in his treatment of the true religion this does not contradict his earlier argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion as divine sanctification but enhances and strengthens it, because only when the Christian religion participates in the life of the Holy One Jesus Christ can it proclaim him as the one who sanctifies it into the true religion. Hunsinger states that, for Barth,

there is only one work of salvation, that it has been accomplished by Jesus Christ, that it is identical with his person, and that being perfect it needs no supplementation but only acknowledgement, reception, participation, anticipation, and proclamation for what it is – these are the great themes of Barth’s soteriology.<sup>672</sup>

This thesis now concludes with an ethical postscript for the Christian religion.

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<sup>670</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 334.

<sup>671</sup> Spross, “The Doctrine of Sanctification,” 70.

<sup>672</sup> Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities,” 333.

## **A CONCLUDING ETHICAL POSTSCRIPT**

Inasmuch as this thesis has argued for a better understanding of and appreciation for Karl Barth's theology of the Christian religion as the true religion by virtue of its fourfold divine sublimation (i.e., creation, election, justification, and sanctification), it also believes that when discussing any facet of Barth's theology of religion in general and/or any religion in particular (e.g., Christianity) it is fitting to demonstrate how one's understanding of his argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion relates to and influences their understanding of his theology of religions. In this conclusion it will be contended that, for Barth, the divine sublimation of the Christian religion as the true religion is not in-and-for-itself; rather, it becomes and is the true religion to witness exclusively to all other religions concerning the severity and graciousness of God in his sublimation of it into the true religion. The Christian religion's role as witness to all other religions, moreover, includes an "ethic of exclusivity," which means the Christian religion as the true religion must exercise a posture of humility and also a corresponding "purified pride" relative to all other religions. However, before it is argued how the Christian religion as the true religion must relate to all other religions, the difficulty of understanding Barth's theology of religions must be discussed. Glenn Chestnutt argues that,

Barth, unlike many of his nineteenth-century predecessors, saw the problem of the relationship between Christianity and other the religions as but one of a number of issues on the agenda of the theologian with which he personally did not have time to deal. Consequently he offered no specific theology of religions, developing instead a theology of religion. This means that any perspective Barth might have on the religions has to be extrapolated from his understanding of religion as a category as well as his treatment of other topics.<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype*, 29-30. This further justifies the argument in chapter one that Barth's theology of religion *is* his theology of religions, albeit in an indirect way.



Because this thesis had previously and exclusively focused on §17 (and the corresponding sections that complement, correct, and complete Barth's doctrine of the true religion) this conclusion will take the exegetical conclusions of that section in chapter one as the presuppositions for any further discussion of Barth's theology of religions. Furthermore, because Barth discusses religion(s) in §17 of his *Church Dogmatics* one should not be surprised when he constructs his theology of religion(s) with a view to the church. Chestnutt remarks that, "It is a well-known fact, however, that Barth's theology does not give particular attention to the religions of the world. When he does speak of them, he usually does so in the context of his examination of the understanding of 'religion' as he perceives it from within Christianity."<sup>674</sup> Moreover, as Greggs contends, "For Barth, the paragraph on religion [i.e., §17] is not that of a theology of the religions (plural), *although it might have implications for one*. It is, instead, a theology of religion (singular), and in this has a very specific and particular focus – the church, as one would expect for a *church* dogmatics."<sup>675</sup> This is important to remember when discussing the relationship of the Christian religion to other religions as Barth discusses the Christian religion first, but not solely, since it is sublimated to testify to all other religions. Naturally, for Barth, the Christian religion does not, cannot, and will not make itself the witness to the sublimating grace of God to all other religions, because it is Jesus Christ alone who sublimates the Christian religion into his witness. Hunsinger states that,

because Barth holds that Jesus Christ actually (and not just potentially) died for all, and that all are elect in him, it is to be expected that salvation will not necessarily be limited to those who have espoused Christianity as an interrelated set of beliefs and practices. However, neither the extent of such cases of salvation nor the manner by which they may be effected is thought to be a matter upon

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<sup>674</sup> Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype*, 6.

<sup>675</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 177-178. First emphasis mine.

which the gospel gives Christians licence to speculate, let alone to depart from their divinely given mission of proclamation. What it does give license to is humility, openness, and hope.<sup>676</sup>

One final point regarding the exclusive focus on §17 and the Christian religion's relationship to other religions is the decision not to make a foray into §69.2 in which Barth theologizes about the "little lights" as unwilling and unwitting media of Jesus Christ the "Light of life."<sup>677</sup> Even though some consider §69.2 to be the *locus classicus* of Barth's theology of religions, and a potential antithesis to his earlier theology of religion(s) in §17, this thesis sides with Kärkkäinen who states that "methodologically, one does not have the right to jump from volume one to volume four and read the former in light of the latter."<sup>678</sup> This is not to say Barth does not view other religions as possible media for the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ (which he does) but that the desire is to know what Barth believes is the reality of religion(s) (e.g., all religions as faithlessness; the Christian religion is the true religion) and not their divinely commandeered possibility (e.g., God might speak through any religion or none). Thus, it will be argued how the Christian religion should relate to all other religions by pointing first to their solidarity in faithlessness and then discussing the Christian religion's witness to its exclusive sublimation.

Regarding the Christian religion's solidarity with all other religions in their mutual participation in and actualization of faithlessness Gregg reminds us that,

Christianity clearly, for Barth, exists alongside all other human expressions of religion. Its unique claims differentiate Christianity from other religions, but not to the degree that Christianity ceases to belong to the same genus as these other

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<sup>676</sup> Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 279.

<sup>677</sup> See *CD IV/3.1*, 38-165.

<sup>678</sup> Kärkkäinen, "Karl Barth and the Theology of Religions," 248.

religions. Even in its best form, for Barth, Christian piety belongs on the same scale as all other pieties.<sup>679</sup>

This does not mean Barth abases or exalts the Christian religion to an arbitrary level alongside all other religions in order to make every religion an equal path to God; rather, it is that even though God sublimates the Christian religion in exclusion to all other religions it still remains a religion condemned by him. Moreover, because Barth interprets all religions in the light of divine revelation this does not entail that all religions are cultural chaff to be (at best) tolerated or (at worst) abolished. Di Noia argues that, “Barth’s theology of the sublation of [the Christian] religion by divine revelation provides no purchase for the devaluation, destruction, or negation of the manifestations of human religion and religiosity.”<sup>680</sup> For Barth it is necessary to renounce all religions as faithlessness and also respectfully uphold, but not accept, the ingenuity of the human imagination for “the divine.” Sven Ensminger notes that,

The attractiveness of Barth’s critical position towards religion *per se* lies precisely in applying this critique first and foremost to the Christian religion. Barth’s preference thereby might be towards the Protestant form of Christianity; however, this does not keep Barth from arguing that, against divine revelation, all forms of Christianity as well as all religions will remain a mere human attempt at grasping something that can only be given by the divine.<sup>681</sup>

The final point regarding the fact that all religions are aides and abettors of faithlessness is that unless the religious human becomes cognizant of her faithlessness through divine revelation she does not truly understand her religiosity as the repetition and perpetuation of faithlessness. Ensminger states that, “Despite the realization that religion is in fact unbelief, a true ‘crisis’ of religion will only be

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<sup>679</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 26.

<sup>680</sup> Di Noia, “Religion and the religions,” 253. See also *CD I/2*, 301.

<sup>681</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology*, 159.

possible when encountered by revelation.”<sup>682</sup> Therefore, the religious human cannot look to her religiosity for justification before whatever deity she constructs but must disdain her religiosity as the manifestation of faithlessness, which is no more than a futile attempt to explicate God. Greggs argues that,

When one is able to recognize that God is not merely the product of human religiosity, which like all created things belongs to this world (as does the so-called ‘god’ it creates), one is able to note that all religious speech about God (even if raised by God’s grace to correspond to some degree to God’s nature) is only ever the speech of religionists about God, rather than definitional and limiting of God’s nature.<sup>683</sup>

This does not mean Christians must cease to proclaim the God of Jesus Christ to those inside and outside the walls of the church but they must be aware that their speech and deeds, even when sublimated by God, do not absolve them of their faithlessness as revealing of and determined by their religious speech and deeds.

Chestnutt states that,

Barth’s judgment against religion is not in anyway an attempt to construe Christianity as inherently superior to other religions. He refuses to establish a hierarchy among religions *qua* human activities – as human, they are inevitably unbelief. Insofar as Christianity is a *human* activity, a *human* response to God’s free grace in Jesus Christ, it too falls under the judgment against religion.<sup>684</sup>

Having established the Christian religion’s solidarity in faithlessness with all other religions, it will now be argued how God sublimates it to be a proleptic and hopeful witness for the sublimation of all other religions.

For Barth, God does not sublimate the Christian religion only for itself but for all other religions even though its sublimation is exclusively proclaimed by the Christian religion. Even though God in Jesus Christ speaks a resounding “No!” to all

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<sup>682</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology*, 65.

<sup>683</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 9.

<sup>684</sup> Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype*, 24-25. Author’s emphasis.

religions (especially the Christian religion) this divine negative contradiction is spoken for the sake of his purgative and affirmative “Yes!” God speaks this dialectical negation/affirmation to all humans regardless and in spite of their faithlessness, which is why for Gorringer, “It is essential in understanding Barth to take the critique with the affirmation.”<sup>685</sup> The critique Barth offers regarding religion(s) as faithlessness is not the ultimate but penultimate word that directs our attention to the God who sublimates the Christian religion in order to witness to the hope that all humans (but not their religions) will be sublimated from their faithlessness. Thus, the Christian religion must declare how God desires to bring all humans into its locus as the true religion for, according to Ensminger,

the perception of the Christian religion as [the] true religion will always remain a statement of faith which members of the Christian Church are invited to profess as precisely this statement of faith, [and yet] this does not deny the great mercy and patience to be extended to those who do not share in the Christian faith.<sup>686</sup>

Inasmuch as this thesis has hitherto discussed the Christian religion as the true religion it will now broaden its horizon to see the possibility for all religious humans to be sublimated by God. To accomplish this, it is pointed out that all humans as religious are first and foremost creatures who are part of the wider creation that is still good even though it is corrupted by “the Nothingness.” According to Krötke, “what mattered to Barth was that Christianity should clarify to *people* of other religions that they are respected and treasured by Christians as creatures of God, just as God respects and treasures them.”<sup>687</sup> That God created this creation with these humans was not an arbitrary decision but one in which, and in spite of humanity’s

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<sup>685</sup> Gorringer, *Against Hegemony*, 244.

<sup>686</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology*, 198.

<sup>687</sup> Krötke, “A New Impetus,” 42. Author’s emphasis.

faithlessness, God eternally willed in Jesus Christ to be for creation including and especially humans regardless of their religious convictions. Greggs states that,

As another distinct from Him, creation is the self-willed expression of God's desire to be for another. Creation in all of its variety and particularity must be seen as having its determination in the eternal will, decree and overflowing love of God to be for another, personified in the second person of the trinity, who bears the name of Jesus Christ. Because of this, there can be no singular prioritization of those who are religious or of the church since God wills and elects *all* creation, and in His work of reconciliation overcomes the negative aspects of created existence.<sup>688</sup>

For Barth, to be a creature of God is to be elected by God, and even though religious humans are faithless, their only possible goal is to become truly religious as sublimated by God in Jesus Christ. Objectively the sublimation of all religious humans by God has already occurred in Jesus Christ and its subjective actualization occurs through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the event of the proclamation of the gospel, primarily by the Christian religion. When this event occurs, according to Greggs, the "Spirit works within creation in order that creation and God can remain fully and respectively creation and God, while still uniting the two to each other. The Spirit enables creation to be the creation it was always intended to be, rather than removing those who seek to live an 'otherworldly' life from creation."<sup>689</sup> This does not mean the subjective work of the Holy Spirit supplants, amends, or improves upon the objective sublimation accomplished in Jesus Christ but that the object of his sublimating work is the religious human, which is clearly and collectively testified to in the divine sublimation of the Christian religion. Greggs states that,

For Barth, religion is an inevitability of human life, but is a phenomenon which is born of the human willingness to engage in idolatry. Barth is concerned, in

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<sup>688</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 92-93. Author's emphasis. Again, it is possible and, at times, desirable to discuss Barth's doctrine of creation *before* his doctrine of election insofar as one always keep in mind that his doctrine of creation presupposes his doctrine of election.

<sup>689</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 93-94.

speaking about the manner in which humans know God, that it is *God* that they know. This knowledge of God, for Barth, from a Christian perspective, can only come through God Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, who ensures that the revelation of God takes place outside of the human being finds a terminus inside the human being.<sup>690</sup>

Furthermore, by contending that the Christian religion is sublimated to witness to all other religions it is not believed that all other humans, regardless of their religious affiliation, will be unilaterally and eternally absolved of their faithlessness but that, if certain religious humans (i.e., Christians) are being sublimated into the true religion, then the hopeful possibility for all humans to be sublimated from the faithlessness of their respective religions must be posited. Therefore, the Christian religion must proclaim to all other religions that because God exclusively sublimates it, all other humans who adhere to these non-sublimated religions could also be sublimated but only by becoming participants in the Christian religion. Ensminger rightly notes that,

While remaining firmly rooted within the Christian faith, Barth does not avoid difficult questions, but much rather calls the Christian community to see their presuppositions challenged in the most unexpected circumstances, while looking beyond human categories to affirm the dignity bestowed upon all of humanity through the divine Yes in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>691</sup>

In the light of the fact that the Christian religion is the sublimated witness to all other religions its corresponding “ethic of exclusivity” will now be discussed.

Although the claim of religious exclusivity is interpreted as bigoted and arrogant in the pluralist society of the Western world, Barth’s argument for the sublimation of the Christian religion cannot be labeled as such because the Christian religion, as an exemplar of faithlessness, is sublimated to be a witness to all religions, particularly their adherents, that God has already, objectively sublimated all religious

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<sup>690</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 38. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>691</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology*, 214-215.

humans in Jesus Christ. Because Barth likens the Christian religion as the true religion analogously to a justified sinner, one cannot place the Christian religion on a higher pedestal relative to all other religions; nor, however, can they view the Christian religion as merely one religion among many as either simply one possible path to “the divine” or so entrenched in faithlessness that it is beyond God’s sublimation of it. Thus, Barth’s ethic of the exclusivity of the Christian religion is first and foremost the posture of humility because of its solidarity with all other religions in faithlessness and second (though no less important or oxymoronic) that of a “purified pride” in which the Christian religion boldly proclaims that it, and it alone, is divinely sublimated. Ensminger states that,

In Barth, there is no arrogance with regard to the truth of the Christian religion – it is a human construct and unbelief just as any religion. However, God’s revelation, which is the only decisive source of judgment, chose to sanctify the Christian religion insofar as it is true to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is therefore not Barth who is assessing revelation and religion – the judgment belongs to God alone, and God in freedom chooses to be revealed in Jesus Christ and elects the Christian religion as the medium insofar as it stays true to the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>692</sup>

Because of the Christian religion’s solidarity with all other religions in faithlessness it must take a posture of humility, which is why Barth makes the methodological move to begin not with the judgment of God on all religions but with the “household of God,” and then proceeds to declare all other religions as equally guilty of faithlessness irrespective of their particular socio-cultural refinement or lack thereof. Greggs states that, for Barth,

Realizing that the condemnation of religion is a condemnation of *Christian* religion guards the Christian against ever thinking that she is in a position of superiority from which to judge the other. For the Christian to recognize in relation to other religions that she does not take the position of God, but of the worst of all idolaters, and that she speaks not with God’s voice but only ever as a

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<sup>692</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology*, 61-62.



religionist, helps her to adopt a more humble attitude towards members of other faiths.<sup>693</sup>

The Christian religion must be humble towards other religions because any inordinate pride would distort its self-perception as the true religion and re-confirm its captivity to faithlessness. By way of example is the subtle and pernicious claim that Christianity is the most highly evolved religion relative to all other religions. Although this may seem to uphold both the sublimation of the Christian religion and retain some semblance of theological tolerance or even relative acceptance of the diminished truthfulness of all other religions, it is no less a manifestation of faithlessness because in shifting from a distinction and division of kind (i.e., the true religion versus all other religions as false) to that of degree (i.e., Christianity is more/most true relative to other religions) it no more proves that the Christian religion is the true religion. Greggs remarks that, “Christianity is not in and of itself true, and the Christian religion has no higher religious status than any other empirical religion.”<sup>694</sup> Consequently, the Christian religion’s posture of humility towards other religions, as determined by divine revelation, is that it is no different in degree or kind from other religions. According to Chestnutt, “this gift given to Christians cannot be wielded as a weapon against others or clung to as a sign of one’s superiority over non-Christians; rather, knowledge of the name of Jesus Christ should impel Christians to be more self-critical of their sinful attempts to control God’s free revelation in Christ.”<sup>695</sup> Even though God has revealed in Jesus Christ

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<sup>693</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 201-202.

<sup>694</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 179.

<sup>695</sup> Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype*, 37.

why the Christian religion must take a posture of humility towards other religions, this is not the goal of its “ethic of exclusivity.” Krötke contends that,

for Christianity there is honestly no reason for arrogance toward other religions. Faced with its actual proclamation and theology, [however] Christianity is continually given the task of *distinguishing* afresh between the proclamation of the true and of the false God. Without being untrue to itself, Christianity cannot remain true to itself without drawing this distinction as it encounters those of another religion together with their faith in other gods, or in a god, or in the divine.<sup>696</sup>

Hence, it will now be argued how and why the Christian religion must also display a “purified pride” by which it proclaims to all other religions that God sublimates it in exclusion to all other religions.

Even though it may seem to be an utter contradiction and/or blatant display of hypocrisy to argue that Barth’s doctrine of the sublimation of the Christian religion necessitates an ethic not only of humility but also a corresponding pride, it is argued that the pride that stems from being the true religion is not a Christian but a Christocentric reality which simultaneously condemns the Christian religion’s faithlessness and then purifies it to be a witness to all other religions that no one is beyond the possibility of divine sublimation. Ensminger argues that,

§17 serves the purpose to show that the Christian community finds its true strength in the humility resulting from having its unbelief exposed by the revelation of God. This is true because the Church, without stopping being a *religious* community too, constantly points away from that which is religion to the God who through God’s revelation exalts her (*hebt sie auf*) and in the process might reveal God’s grace to all of God’s creation by speaking true words and becoming a light that points to the Light of Jesus Christ.<sup>697</sup>

The pride that manifests in faithlessness and condemns the Christian religion is sublimated by God in the event of his self-revelation and re-directed to a godly end – the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Throughout this process, however,

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<sup>696</sup> Krötke, “A New Impetus,” 42. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>697</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology*, 81.

the Christian religion must remember that, according to Ensminger, “the revelation of God can uplift and sustain the Christian religion; the merit, however, will only be due to God’s activity, and the human being engaged in religious activity has to remember that he or she will always be responding to God’s grace.”<sup>698</sup>

Another aspect of the “purified pride” of the Christian religion as the true religion is inter-religious dialogue and the ethics thereof. Apart from the event of divine sublimation the Christian religion will engage in inter-religious dialogue to the end of proclaiming itself as the means and medium to God rather than the mediator Jesus Christ. Because of its faithlessness the Christian religion dialogues, in a chameleon-like fashion, with other religions and those who subscribe to none in such a way that, according to Greggs, it “all too often can engage in dialogue with secularists by emphasizing how sophisticated and ‘adult’ its thinking is in contradistinction to more juvenile co-religionists, [and] simultaneous to dialoguing with members of other religions by pointing to commonalities and continuities between one religion and another.”<sup>699</sup> Because of its faithlessness the Christian religion covertly desires social respectability and how best to utilize the contemporary cultural acceptability of tolerance all the while trying to establish a proselytizing point of contact between itself and other religions (and none) to compare and contrast itself with. Greggs sounds a clarion call to the Christian religion when he states that,

Without careful theological thought about what ‘religion’ as a category might mean, there is the danger that inter-religious engagement (even, and perhaps most especially, in its homogenized liberal form) marches to the beat of an externally

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<sup>698</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology*, 163.

<sup>699</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 8.

authoritative secular drum which sounds a resolutely non-theological religious tone.<sup>700</sup>

Only when the Christian religion understands itself and other religions in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ can it properly perceive itself as a religion like all other religions who perpetuate faithlessness; and yet, God sublimates it into the true religion to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to itself and other religious humans who are all in need of sublimation. Greggs summarizes how the Christian religion's "ethic of exclusivity" relates to inter-religious dialogue when he states that,

Uncomfortable as Barth's theology of religion is, it reminds us of how uncomfortable those seats at the inter-faith table not only are but—if we are to be internally coherent and to be present as members of our own faiths—have to be. This is not to engage in something unloving; quite the opposite, it is to bear that discomfort out of love for the other. Such sacrificial love is an even greater virtue than that of tolerance: while tolerance pertains principally to ideas, love pertains to persons, and in sitting with those who believe different things than we do, we do not simply play with ideas but engage in love for the other.<sup>701</sup>

Finally, the Christian religion's purified pride has its divinely ordained limits, which are evident in the fact that, according to Ensminger, "Barth does not give a *carte blanche* to Christian religion as a whole – the judgment regarding the truth of the Christian religion belongs to God, and the call for the Christian Church as the visible form of the Christian Community will always have to re-examine herself how far it is true to the revelation in Jesus Christ."<sup>702</sup> This continual re-examination occurs in the event of divine revelation as the Christian religion hears that it is *simul iustus et peccator* meaning it can never, this side of the eschaton, be completely free of faithlessness; and yet because of God's sublimation of it must proclaim the

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<sup>700</sup> Greggs, *Theology Against Religion*, 8-9.

<sup>701</sup> Greggs, "Bringing Barth's Critique of Religion to the Inter-faith Table," 83.

<sup>702</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth's Theology*, 62.

possibility that all humans (regardless of religious affiliation) can be sublimated by God in Jesus Christ. Krötke remarks that Barth

urges [the church of] each and every age to distinguish every ecclesial and theological interpretation of the truth of God—including Barth’s own interpretation—from the *event* of the truth of God. [He] enjoins Christian theology in every era to *discern* whether or not those interpretations correspond with this event, which is not at anyone’s disposal. There was nothing Karl Barth resisted more than the attempt to turn the free and sovereign event of the truth of the revealed God into a principle managed and manipulated by humans.<sup>703</sup>

The Christian religion cannot escape its religious shadow and must not self-righteously compare/contrast itself with other religions in order to prove itself worthy of a divine imprimatur; rather, the Christian religion as the true religion must proclaim, not apart from but in spite of, its faithlessness that it is divinely sublimated into faithfulness. Ensminger states that,

Barth succeeds in offering a theology of religions that is fully aware of religion but refuses to put it centre stage. Barth’s position succeeds, thus, by being clearly positioned within Christian theology, challenging the Christian community to become more faithful to revelation. By doing so, it proclaims the Good News of the Gospel that God has reconciled them in Jesus Christ *together with* their religion.<sup>704</sup>

Karl Barth’s theology of the true religion as found within his *Church Dogmatics* is a unique and original contribution in the history of Christian theology, particularly as regards the debate over whether or not the Christian religion is simply one amongst, or even the highest of, all human religions; or whether it is, in fact, *the* true religion in contrast to all others. In this thesis it has been argued that Barth’s theology of the true religion as found in §17.3, especially the four “aspects” is the culmination of his argument that the Christian religion is the true religion as analogous to the individual Christian being a justified sinner. By focusing primarily

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<sup>703</sup> Krötke, “A New Impetus,” 32. Author’s emphases.

<sup>704</sup> Ensminger, *Karl Barth’s Theology*, 238. Author’s emphasis.

on the four “aspects” and the arguments therein, and then proceeding to the corresponding sections in the later volumes of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, it has been demonstrated how his mature doctrinal formulations on creation, election, justification, and sanctification have clarified, corrected, and completed Barth’s earlier argument for the Christian religion as the true religion. The theological indicative of the four “aspects” necessitates the positing of the ethical imperative for the Christian religion as the true religion, which must relate to other religions from a posture of humility and with a purified pride whereby it proclaims that even though it is a faithless religion like all other religions it, and it alone, is the true religion because of God’s sublimation of it. This humble and proud proclamation by the Christian religion is a summons to all other religious humans to forsake their faithless religiosity and join the Christian religion, for since God sublimates the Christian religion, which is the most faithless of all religions, there is hope for all other religious humans to be “caught up” in the event of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

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